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# GRAMOPHONE

## SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

### Brahms · Schubert

'As the Songbird Sings'

Brahms Six Piano Pieces, Op 118.

Albumblatt, Op posth

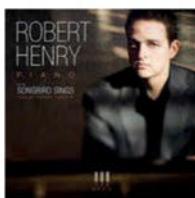
Bendel Improvisation on the Wiegenlied by Johannes Brahms, Op 141 Lassen/Liszt

Löse Himmel, meine Seele, S494/

Schubert Four Impromptus, D899

Robert Henry pf

Muuz (66' • DDD)



Although Brahms's Op 118 Piano Pieces hardly lack for world-class recordings,

Robert Henry's generous and big-boned yet lyrically informed pianism enlivens these well-worn works. The first two and final pieces abound with impassioned, long-lined rhetoric and dynamic contrast while Henry honours No 3's *energico* directive yet still takes great care over clarifying the textural strands. More than many pianists, Henry allows No 4's right-hand lines to soar independently from the busy accompanying triplets, and No 5 grows more flexible as it progresses, following a slightly foursquare start. Henry precedes Op 118 with Eduard Lassen's *Löse Himmel, meine Seele* as ravishingly retooled by Franz Liszt, and brings far more urgency and sweep to the cascading climaxes than Leslie Howard and Valerie Tryon do in their respective recordings.

The Bohemian composer and pianist Franz Bendel was a short-lived contemporary of Brahms, and a rather workman talent, judging from this premiere recording of his Op 141 fantasy on the famous *Cradle Song*. The piece goes on too long for what it has to say, yet Henry's multi-layered interpretation makes the music's best possible case. By contrast, Brahms's minute-and-a-half, posthumously published A minor *Albumblatt* is a minor masterpiece, and here possibly receives its finest recorded performance.

I'm less enamoured by Henry's stiff execution of the staccato chords in Schubert's C minor Impromptu, although he imbues the E flat Impromptu's pearly

### GRAMOPHONE talks to...

#### Waldland Ensemble

The group discuss new music and the importance of their conservation

**Clarinet, viola and piano is an unusual combination. How did this come about?**

This project began with the desire to perform a recital with friends.



Mozart's *Kegelstatt* Trio, scored for this combination, was our starting point, but we needed more to fill out the programme. We loved the instrumental combination but found that there was not much repertoire written for it, which is how we came to commission new music.

**You clearly enjoy working with composers and performing new music.**

We love the standard repertoire, but art continues to evolve and it is thrilling to be a part of that growing legacy. Our first commission quickly expanded to five new works, filling an entire programme. Working with living composers to create new music

is an essential part of our musical lives.

**Your conservation work is also important.**

Musical instruments are made from natural resources, some of which are

now endangered. The Mpingo tree is prized for the heavy, dark ebony wood that is used to create clarinets. Pernambuco's strength and flexibility make it an ideal material for string-instrument bows. Both of these trees are on the endangered species list, among many others that are used for musical instruments. As an ensemble, we strive to raise awareness of the link between the environment and our music, and to help support efforts to create sustainable trade practices to preserve these 'musical trees' for future generations.

#### What are your future plans?

Our next project has a multimedia component. Watch this space!

### Chase

Bhajan

Robin Lorentz elec vn Nicholas Chase elecs

Cold Blue Music (66' • DDD)



Over the course of five days on Seattle's Mercer Island, where the noted billionaire Paul Allen lives, former California EAR Unit violinist Robin Lorentz taped *Bhajan*, four movements without pause she had commissioned from composer Nicholas Chase, in which her playing was augmented by his signal processing and

# GIACOMO PUCCINI: COMPLETE SONGS FOR SOPRANO & PIANO

Krassimira Stoyanova\* and Maria Prinz



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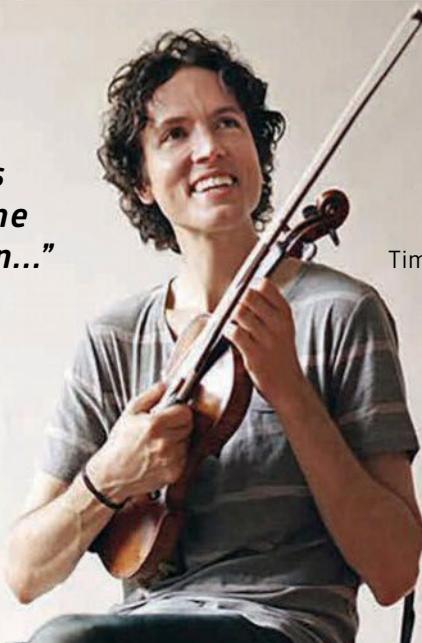
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- OPERA NEWS

\*Krassimira Stoyanova is singing the role of Aida at the Met Opera, March & April, 2017

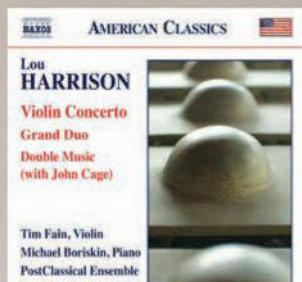
# LOU HARRISON: CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND PERCUSSION

Tim Fain | Michael Borisikin | PostClassical Ensemble | Angel Gil-Ordóñez



**“[Tim Fain]’s tone is dark yet athletic; he plays a mean violin...”**

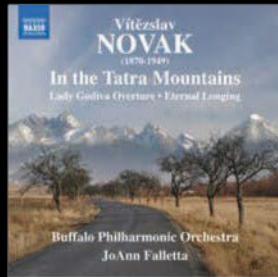
- NEW YORK TIMES



8559825 · 636943982525  
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# VÍTEZSLAV NOVÁK: IN THE TATRA MOUNTAINS

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and JoAnn Falletta



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AVAILABLE: 04.17.17

**“...one of the finest conductors of her generation.”**

- NEW YORK TIMES



PHOTO: CHERYL GORSKI



Andrew Rangell offers highly personalised readings of Chopin's Mazurkas

programming treatments. With health issues having sidelined the violinist since 2007, Chase conceived *Bhajan* as physical therapy for his friend; the choice of a title referencing free-form Hindu devotional songs similar to ragas seemed natural given Chase's work with free-range SoCal musical giants Morton Subotnick and Lucky Mosko, with Ziad Bunni at the Aleppo Conservatory of Arabic Classical Music, and with James Tenney and Pauline Oliveros, and indeed his own recent interest in yoga.

In fact, *Bhajan* was the composer's first work shaped by his new understanding of the relationship between music and spirituality, and there is a feeling throughout of waiting for a response. Initially, Chase and Lorentz create a musical environment constructed with a vast inventory of electronic ear candy, like music that R2-D2 and C-3PO would be listening to over cocktails. Gradually, the delightfully tactile digital textures seem to become almost instrumental: a horn in the first movement, a hurdy-gurdy drone in the second.

The sci-fi ambience sets the stage for the full impact of Lorentz's expressive, lyrical, rhapsodic virtuosity; and yet, at the end, after an extraordinary arc of pure sound has led to a celestial rainbow, there is still, as at the beginning, a sense of waiting. **Laurence Vittes**

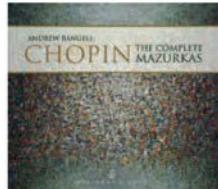
## Chopin

Complete Mazurkas

**Andrew Rangell** pf

Steinway & Sons M ② STNS30071 (145' • DDD)

From Dorian DOR93258



First released on the Dorian label in 1999, Andrew Rangell's complete Chopin

Mazurkas cycle gains a new lease of catalogue life via Steinway & Sons. Listeners familiar with Rangell's idiosyncratic interpretative style vis-à-vis Bach, Beethoven and, well, just about everyone else won't be surprised by his highly personalised readings and pronounced metric leeway. Indeed, selections where the characteristic mazurka rhythm prevails in the foreground often sound 'un-mazurka-like'.

Op 17 No 1 in B flat, for example, conveys appropriate exuberance but with gawky, self-conscious accentuation, while the usually flowing and soaring Op 7 No 1 in the same key emerges choppy and constipated, despite Rangell's excellent cross-rhythmic phrasing. Rangell overloads the unpretentious C major, Op 68 No 1, with emphatic, superfluous stresses and fussy pointing. The gentle grandness and grace of Op 50 No 3 in C sharp minor also fall

flat under the arrhythmia of Rangell's compulsive underlining.

But sometimes Rangell's liberties shed fresh and novel light on thrice familiar texts. For example, the opening note of the main theme of the G minor Mazurka, Op 24 No 1, seems exaggeratedly detached, like a hiccup. Yet in the score, the actual note is followed by a rest and is marked *rubato*. Here I think Rangell is attempting to honour Chopin's intentions, albeit by overstating the case. Rangell also captures the earthy flavour of the droning left hand of the C major, Op 56 No 2, with variegated voicings and expressive dips that don't detract from the bigger picture. Although Op 24 No 4 in B flat minor is most persuasive when it kicks and soars, the music's contrapuntal and textural elaboration can withstand Rangell's epic, outsize and overly probed conception.

In general, the lyrical, introspective and harmonically complex Mazurkas absorb Rangell's phraseology best, such as the two A minor works, Op 7 No 2 and Op 17 No 4, the C minor, Op 56 No 3, and the composer's valedictory F minor, Op 68 No 4. In short, if interventionist Mazurka players such as Jean-Marc Luisada (DG or Sony Classical) and Russell Sherman (Avie, A/12) hold appeal, so will Andrew Rangell. Personally, I'll stick with the more direct and idiomatic Barbosa (Centaur), Ohlsson (Hyperion) and Harasiewicz (NIFC).

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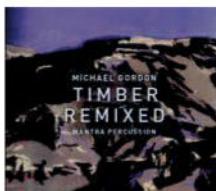
## Gordon

**Timber Remixed. Timber Live**

### Mantra Percussion

Cantaloupe ⑧ ⑨ CA21121 (119' • DDD)

Remixes also available on ⑧ ⑩ CA21121LP



'Timber!' is what lumberjacks yell to alert colleagues that a tree is falling. But there's no need to run away from this two-disc set built around Michael Gordon's 2009 percussion work of the same name (minus the exclamation point). On one disc is the work's original version, scored for six amplified simantras (also known as 2x4s); the other holds 12 remixes of the piece by electronic artists.

You might justifiably wonder whether a 50-minute piece for planks of wood can hold our attention, but Gordon has never been at a loss to provide and sustain musical interest. The composer, one of the founders of the Bang on a Can Festival, is a master of rhythmic interweaving and timbral (get it?) subtlety. In the original *Timber*, he alters patterns to spellbinding effect, taking advantage of the different lengths of wood to achieve a spectrum of delicate and vibrant sonorities. The live performance here by the wizardly members of Mantra Percussion has a visceral impact that will keep you glued to wherever you're listening.

The remixes add all sorts of electronic effects – from choral layers and drones to variations on rhythms and textures – to complement and comment on Gordon's urgent sensibility. Each track offers something new and often compelling, finding inventive ways to alter the original material while celebrating its finely graded personality.

The two discs differ not only in terms of genre but also in scale. The remixes are modest portions to be consumed separately. The live original is like an extended, non-stop meal. Both are worthy of appetising consideration.

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Manchicourt

*Reges terrae. Missa Reges terrae. Coro mea. Ne reminiscaris. Vidi speciosum. Regina caeli*  
**The Choir of St Luke in the Fields / David Shuler**  
MSR Classics ⑧ MS1632 (66' • DDD • T/T)



It is one of the joys of a recording like this that it brings a remote moment in classical music history – in this case the brief fame allotted to Pierre de Manchicourt in the mid-16th century – so vividly alive. Through the variety of its programming and the quality of the performances, this disc enables you to feel the force of Manchicourt's contribution to the rapid evolution of the Mass and motet, which along with the chanson were his principal genres.

As one of the elite composers who held prestigious positions during the lives and reigns of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Philip II of Spain, Manchicourt's career culminated when he was hired as master of Philip's Flemish Chapel. Yet by 1600, as John Bradley's engrossing booklet-note unhappily reports, 'Manchicourt was largely forgotten'.

After a conventionally powerful and eloquent *Missa Reges terrae* (its first recording) covers familiar ground, *Caro mea*, an unconventionally sweet, six-minute surge of passion, nearly overwhelms its formal dimensions. On a disc with only one apparent duplication (the opening motet *Reges terrae*, on which the Mass is based) the other most notable music is *Vidi speciosum*, an exquisite tone poem for eight voices.

Compared to the Huelgas Ensemble's sumptuously precise groundbreaking anthology (Sony Classical, 1/98) and the Brabant Ensemble's stunning *Missa Cuidez* a decade later (Hyperion, 6/07), the 12 members of the Greenwich Village-based Choir of St Luke in the Fields under David Shuler show a warmer, more human side of Manchicourt's art.

**Laurence Vittes**

## R Paterson

**'Spheres'**

**Moon Trio. Sun Trio. Elegy<sup>a</sup>**

**Claremont Trio with <sup>b</sup>Karen Ouzounian vc**  
American Modern Recordings ⑧ AMR1046  
(72' • DDD)



Robert Paterson (b1970) is an award-winning composer (as well as a percussionist

and conductor) from Buffalo in New York State. Chamber music makes up a sizeable portion of his output, including two piano trios. *Sun Trio* (1995, revised 2008) is in five substantial movements, running to 40 minutes. Piano trios are notoriously difficult to balance but Paterson resolves the issues convincingly. The opening 'Sun Day' is the largest span, a paean to the star in summer. 'Sunset' is a delightful tone poem inspired by the composer's wife teaching him to tango. 'Absence of Sun', 'Sunrise' and 'Sun Dance' provide further variety of mood. Overall, it is a touch overlong for its material but never irredeemably so; the fine performance here is from 2011, featuring the trio's founding pianist, Donna Kwong.

Paterson achieved a tighter balance of form and content 20 years later in *Moon Trio*, written for the Claremont Trio and premiered by them (with new pianist Andrea Lam) in 2015. Its four concise movements are even more diverse in character, ranging from the dreamlike ('Moonbeams' and 'Blue Moon') to the explosive (the concluding 'Moon Trip'); Paterson's sense of humour comes through in the scherzo, 'Lunatic Asylum', placed second. The disc is concluded by the gently moving Elegy for two bassoons and piano (2006-07), given here in its 2008 arrangement for two cellos and piano.

The performances by the three different line-ups are vivid and AMR's sound reasonably clear. The composer's booklet text needs a proper proof-read but otherwise production values are good. **Guy Rickards**

## American Voices'

**Bunch Four Flashbacks Constantino**

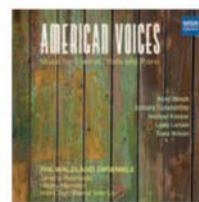
**Ritual Songs Kimber Vanishing Woods**

**Larsen Ferlinghetti D Wilson A Thousand**

**Whirling Dreams**

**The Waldland Ensemble**

**MSR Classics ⑧ MS1541 (71' • DDD)**



The Waldland Ensemble have two missions: expanding the repertoire for clarinet, viola and piano, and raising awareness of conservation issues. Both goals are noted in the group's new disc of premiere recordings. The five works are at once accessible and inventive, the 'American Voices' of the disc's title reflecting an array of styles and narratives.

The piece that fulfils the ensemble's dual missions to most striking effect is Michael



July 10–July 16 2017

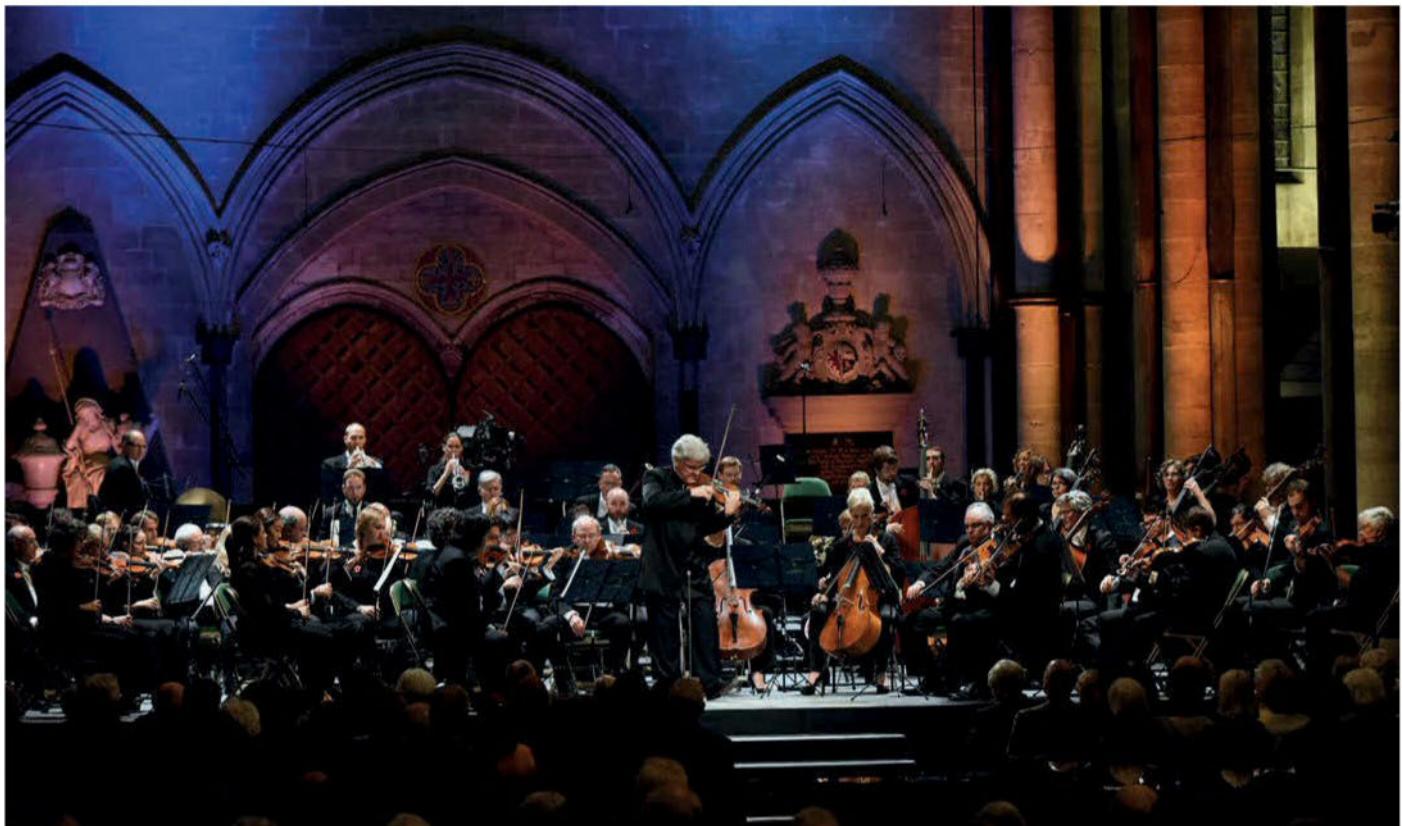
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Leif Ove Andsnes  
Olli Mustonen  
Nils Anders Mortensen  
Lise de la Salle  
Quatuor Danel  
Engegaard Quartet  
Lukas Hagen  
Marianne Beate Kielland  
Radovan Vlatkovic  
Ragnhild Lothe  
Knut Erik Sundquist  
Ketil Bjørnstad  
Æresgjest: Arve Tellefsen

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'Buoyancy, point and poetry': Pinchas Zukerman with Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra

Kimber's *Vanishing Woods*, both a salute to forests and a cautionary tale about their future. Scored for clarinet and viola, the music assumes many guises, from lament and celebration to anger and hope. Another work for clarinet and viola, Kenji Bunch's *Four Flashbacks*, paints nostalgic scenes in colourful, jazzy and tender contexts.

Dana Wilson takes inspiration from a Langston Hughes poem in *A Thousand Whirling Dreams*, whose three captivating movements evoke images of shadows and the sun. The moods are dark, ominous and fierce in Anthony Constantino's *Ritual Songs*, which gives the musicians myriad opportunities to engage in compelling conversation.

The disc's witty entry is Libby Larsen's *Ferlinghetti*, six miniatures inspired by verses from the eponymous American poet's *A Coney Island of the Mind*. The music balances sonic dexterity with whimsy, reaching an apex of lunacy in the sixth movement, a depiction of clowns at the circus performing antics to titbits of 23 patriotic tunes. Clarinettist Jeremy Reynolds, viola player Hilary Herndon and pianist Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo are expert champions of repertoire they bring dynamically to life.

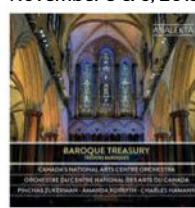
**Donald Rosenberg**

## 'Baroque Treasury'

JS Bach Orchestral Suite No 3, BWV1068.  
Concerto for Oboe and Violin, BWV1060<sup>a</sup>  
Handel Solomon - Arrival of the Queen of Sheba  
Tartini Pastorale (arr Respighi)<sup>b</sup>  
Telemann Concerto, TWV51:G9<sup>c</sup>  
Vivaldi Concerto for Violin and Cello, RV547<sup>d</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Charles Hamann ob <sup>b</sup>Amanda Forsyth vc  
Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra /  
Pinchas Zukerman abd vn/va

Analekta Ⓛ AN2 8783 (74' • DDD)

Recorded live at Southam Hall,  
Canada's National Arts Centre, Ottawa,  
November 5 & 6, 2015



Arguments about period versus modern instruments in Baroque repertoire may reign forever, but performances in recent decades have proved that commanding music can work its wonders whatever equipment is being used. Although Pinchas Zukerman has railed famously against the early music movement, he doesn't appear to have ignored what he once found so ignominious, at least not if his 'Baroque Treasury' recording with Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra is any indication.

The violinist-viola player-conductor, who served as the orchestra's music director from 1999 until 2015, operates in all three capacities in these live performances. He leads works by Handel and JS Bach and appears as soloist in music by Bach, Telemann, Tartini and Vivaldi. For an artist who has long championed romantic voluptuousness and expressive urgency, Zukerman here plays with a sense of style and vibrancy that honours the music at hand. Moments of aggressive attack and juicy vibrato sometimes peer around the tonal corner but Zukerman mostly treats the music with buoyancy, point and poetry.

He teams with superb colleagues – Charles Hamann (oboe) and Amanda Forsyth (cello) – in trim, propulsive accounts of concertos by Bach and Vivaldi, while elegantly going it solo as violinist in Tartini's *Pastorale* (in Respighi's transcription) and as viola player in Telemann's Concerto in G.

As conductor, Zukerman collaborates closely with the excellent National Arts Centre ensemble in the Sinfonia from Handel's *Solomon* and Bach's Third Orchestral Suite, in which the beloved Air receives expansive, dignified treatment and the trumpets are nothing short of stellar.

**Donald Rosenberg**

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## Rostropovich, and his towering musical legacy

**T**here were two occasions when I was fortunate enough to interview Mstislav Rostropovich, only one of which was in person. But both times I encountered a figure who, to employ a cliché, really *was* larger than life. It was as if he was bursting to communicate, to tell a story. In person, as in performer. The first time was to coincide with the release by BBC Legends of his now – and again, another cliché doesn't seem hyperbolic – legendary performance of the Dvořák Concerto from the 1968 Proms, a Czech work performed by Russian artists on the day the Soviet regime suppressed the Prague Spring. There are few more powerful examples of where music can make a statement more eloquently than words will allow.

The second time was about Beethoven, not politics, to discuss the release of the Violin Concerto, him conducting, Maxim Vengerov the soloist. 'He's like a grandfather to me' said Vengerov, a quiet, respectful presence in the room. Rostropovich was having none of it. 'Not father, not grandfather, just brother!' he said, as he held court with a level of enthusiasm and energy that wouldn't have shamed someone half his age.

We decided to focus, for our cover feature, on Rostropovich's legacy in terms of repertoire. Many great musicians throughout history have, through their interpretations, influenced the way other artists approach certain repertoire. Few, however, have actually changed that repertoire quite so definitively. Partly, of course, this was because, prior to Rostropovich, the cello repertoire simply lacked



M  
Michael

### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I encountered Rostropovich for the first time in 1987 and, for the next 20 years, he was one of my favourite

musicians,' recalls **MICHAEL MCMANUS**, author of our cover feature. 'Consequently, as I have put together this tribute to his formidable legacy, there have been many smiles and not a few tears.'



Meeting Sir Harrison Birtwistle was 'a real joy', says **KATE MOLLESON** after interviewing the

composer about his new Stravinsky recording for this issue. 'He's not one to suffer fools gladly, but underneath the infamous gruffness he is charming, hilarious and full of spirit.'



'Gramophone's faith in Benjamin Appl as our Young Artist of the Year is borne out in his first album for Sony, "Heimat";' writes our Editor-in-Chief **JAMES JOLLY** who interviewed the baritone for this issue. 'Talking to him was to encounter a keen mind as well as a beautiful voice.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coglan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nicol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

the sheer number of masterpieces of, say, those of the piano, violin or voice. We could place the pioneers of the guitar repertoire – Julian Bream, John Williams and others – in the same category, for the same reason.

But it wasn't just down to a dogged determination in pursuit of pieces. Rostropovich's personality played a key role – that energy, that ability to inspire composers of the likes of Britten, Shostakovich and Prokofiev, that willingness to be a public figure. This latter point occurred to me when attending a recent press conference to launch Sir Simon Rattle's opening season with the London Symphony Orchestra. Most orchestras hold season launches, but they're generally attended by the music press. Because of Rattle, this one felt like a mainstream news conference. Few figures attain that status – Rostropovich did.

But back to Rostropovich and his greatest gift, which was, of course, his playing. He was, in short, a brilliant musician. Most readers will own many a Rostropovich recording, and for those who don't – or indeed *do* – two new box-sets from labels with which he had strong links, Warner Classics (Teldec and EMI as then was) and Universal Classics (covering Philips, DG and Decca) offer an excellent way to explore his art. But perhaps, in the spirit of our feature, the best way to pay tribute to this towering figure is to listen not only to him, but to the likes of Steven Isserlis, Alisa Weilerstein, Alban Gerhardt and all those many stars of the cello who came after him, who take works that only exist because of Rostropovich, and make them speak afresh to a new generation.

[martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com](mailto:martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com)

**Gramophone**, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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# March Releases



## Disc of the Month

### Sullivan: Songs

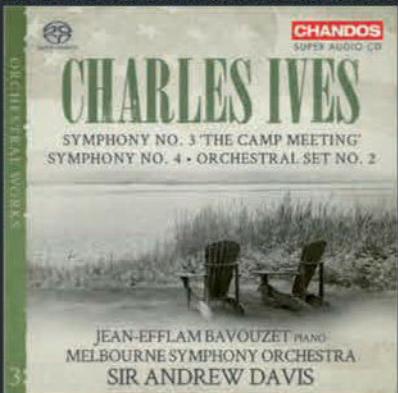
Mary Bevan | Ben Johnson | Ashley Riches | David Owen Norris

This exceptional set gathers the finest young British vocal talents in a unique programme of songs by Sullivan, many of them very rarely recorded.

Widely acclaimed in key operatic roles across the UK and abroad, the soprano Mary Bevan, tenor Ben Johnson, and bass-baritone Ashley Riches – who here appears on Chandos for the first time – explore fifty years of Sir Arthur Sullivan's large non-operatic vocal output. They are accompanied by the pianist David Owen Norris, highly praised for his many concerto performances at the BBC Proms.

CHAN 10935(2)

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### Ives Orchestral Works, Vol. 3

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet  
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra  
Sir Andrew Davis

In this third volume of an already globally popular series, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet takes on the challenging solo piano part in Ives's Symphony No. 4. Also including the rarely performed Orchestral Set No. 2 and Pulitzer Prize winning Symphony No. 3.

CHSA 5174



### Liszt/Wagner Piano Works

Imogen Cooper

After highly successful recordings of works by Brahms, the Schumanns, and Chopin, Imogen Cooper plunges into the world of another great romantic, Franz Liszt, and places him alongside that other giant, Richard Wagner. Breathtaking music in unique interpretations: romanticism without melodrama, virtuosity without fuss.

CHAN 10938



### British Tone Poems Vol. 1

BBC National Orchestra of Wales  
Rumon Gamba

Alongside their British Isles Overtures series, the BBC NOW and Rumon Gamba launch a project to bring often neglected symphonic poems by British composers to wider attention. This first volume presents some of the most rarely heard, British tone poems written in the early twentieth century.

CHAN 10939

## APRIL 2017 RELEASES

Tasmin Little Fanny   Faure Szymanowski	Elgar Symphony No. 1 Introduction and Allegro	A Sousa Celebration	J.S. Bach St John Passion
CHAN 10940	CHSA 5181	CHSA 5182	CHSA 5183(2)

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# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



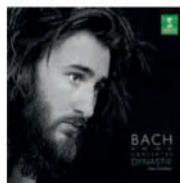
## RECORDING OF THE MONTH



### TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphonies Nos 3, 4 and 6  
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko  
Onyx  
► **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 24**

Tchaikovsky symphonies in this slot, two months in a row? I make no apology (besides, they're different symphonies) – Petrenko's now complete cycle is an achievement well worthy of praise.



### BACH FAMILY 'Dynastie'

Keyboard Concertos  
Jean Rondeau *hp* et al  
Erato

Directing from the harpsichord, Jean

Rondeau leads his colleagues – who all seem to share a happy rapport – in a highly enjoyably and characterful survey of music by Bach father and sons.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 27**



### BEETHOVEN 'Complete String Quartets, Vol 3'

Elias Quartet

Wigmore Hall Live  
A crowded catalogue certainly, but on

the evidence of both this and the first volume's Editor's Choice accolade, the young Elias Quartet are building an impressive Beethoven cycle.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



### 'HEIMAT'

Benjamin Appl *bar*

James Baillieu *pf*

Sony Classical

The beauty of voice and thoughtfulness in interpretation that led us to name Benjamin Appl our Young Artist of the Year – and for Sony Classical to sign him – are very evident on this recital.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**

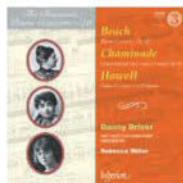


### DVD/BLU-RAY

SCHOENBERG *Gurrelieder*  
Sols; Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra / Marc Albrecht  
Opus Arte

*Gurrelieder* as you probably won't have seen it before: staged. 'It makes', as our critic Hugo Shirley puts it 'for fascinating viewing.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



### BEACH. CHAMINADE. HOWELL

Piano Concertos  
Danny Driver *pf* BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Rebecca Miller  
Hyperion

A nice parallel to this month's Specialist's Guide, three unfamiliar works, by women (a first in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series), given strong advocacy.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 29**



### LISZT. SAINT-SAËNS

Works for Two Pianos  
Ludmila Berlinskaya, Arthur Ancelle *pfs*  
Melodiya

A hugely enjoyable opportunity to hear one of the most familiar and formidable piano sonatas in an unfamiliar form – great virtuosity, with the added challenge of collaboration!

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



### 'SACRED DUETS'

Nuria Rial *sop*

Valer Sabadus *countertenor*

Basel Chamber Orchestra

Sony Classical

This is a delightful disc: two voices – a pure, agile soprano and rich, rounded countertenor – which feel perfectly suited both to this repertoire, and to each other.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



### REISSUE/ARCHIVE

WILLIAM KAPELL

Marston

Killed in a plane crash aged 31, Kapell's discography is relatively small: these broadcasts and concerts, many of them first releases, are valuable additions.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



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# FOR THE RECORD



Roberto Alagna: a prolific recording artist who has committed his future to Sony Classical

## Roberto Alagna signs exclusive recording contract with Sony Music

Roberto Alagna has signed an exclusive, multi-album recording contract with Sony Classical. The tenor, who has sold more than 5 million albums in France alone, announced: 'I am utterly delighted to become part of the international Sony Classical family. I have long since admired the label and its achievements and I look forward to a long and fruitful association in the years ahead.' His first album for Sony Classical will be released in 2018.

Alagna is a prolific recording artist and in 2001 won two *Gramophone* Awards: the Recital Award for his album of French arias with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and conductor Bertrand de Billy, and the Opera Award for Massenet's *Manon* alongside his then-wife Angela Gheorghiu and with the Orchestra and Chorus of La Monnaie and Antonio Pappano.

Alagna rose to prominence in 1988 when he won the Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition and made his professional debut as Alfredo Germont in Verdi's *La traviata* with the Glyndebourne Touring Company.

*Gramophone*'s Alan Blyth, in his review of one of Alagna's first appearances on record (Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*,

conducted by Marcello Viotti, 1993), compared the tenor favourably with the young Pavarotti: 'For those who have yet to hear of him let me explain that Roberto Alagna is a French tenor of Sicilian parents who won the 1988 Pavarotti Prize and bids fair to succeed the big man if he is given space to develop in his own time. At the moment his singing reminds one inevitably of the younger Pavarotti on the 1971 Bonyngé/Decca set, except that Alagna sounds even younger, even more vulnerable, certainly more so than Pavarotti's elder self (Levine/DG). He brought wonder to these well-tried ears when he sang Rodolfo at Covent Garden last year and here proves that that was no fluke.'

Of Alagna's new Sony deal, Bogdan Roscic, President of Sony Music Masterworks, stated: 'Not only has Roberto Alagna been a leading operatic presence for many years, he has also become a true force outside of opera by possessing that quality so rare in the classical world – the ability to create music across genre boundaries – not by dumbing down any of those genres but by combining them in ways which are new, surprising and always of the highest quality. I couldn't be happier that he has decided to continue his recording work with Sony Classical.'

## Pierre-Laurent Aimard awarded 2017 Ernst von Siemens Music Prize

Worth 250,000 euros, the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize is awarded annually, 'for a life devoted to the service of music', with its previous recipients including Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein and Pierre Boulez. This year the recipient is the French pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard.

Aimard is renowned for the breadth of the repertoire of which he is a master, from Bach to Ligeti and almost everything in between. He has won

## Jean-Efflam Bavouzet continues his Haydn series for Chandos

As David Threasher noted when he reviewed the first instalment of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's complete cycle of Haydn's piano sonatas back in 2010, it is 'interesting that the most intelligent musicians, the deepest-thinking of them, all maintain Haydn as a private passion'.

The sixth volume in Bavouzet's series is due for release in early May and includes the Partita 'Sonata' in B flat, HobXVI/2, Sonata in D, HobXVI/33, Sonata in A flat, HobXVI/43, Sonata in C, HobXVI/21 and Sonata in E flat, HobXVI/28.

## Borusan Quartet record contemporary string quartets

In January the Borusan Quartet, with producer Simon Kiln and engineer Arne Akselberg, recorded a selection of contemporary string quartets for an album due for release on the Onyx label in September.

The album includes Pēteris Vasks's String Quartet No 4, Arvo Pärt's *Summa* and *Fratres*, György Kurtág's *12 Microludes* and Hasan Ucar's String Quartet. The Borusan Quartet was founded in Turkey in 2005 and won the gold medal at the 2010 ICMEC International Chamber Music Competition.

## Sabine Devieilhe explores French Romantic works with Les Siècles

Last year, soprano Sabine Devieilhe won the *Gramophone* Recital Award

two Gramophone Awards for recordings of Ligeti's music – in 1995 for the Piano Concerto with Ensemble InterContemporain, conducted by Pierre Boulez (1/95), and in 1997 for the solo piano Études.

Upon receiving the award, Aimard said: 'We musicians should be ambassadors for what we call "classical music" so that we can pass on a rich legacy to a new audience and younger generations. Music outreach can start with any kind of music – with Mozart, Stravinsky, Lachenmann or any music on this planet. If the outreach is done well, any music can be meaningful and become familiar to anyone, especially young people.'



Bavouzet auditions two pianos for a Haydn album

for her album *Mozart – The Weber Sisters*, which featured Ensemble Pygmalion and conductor Raphaël Pichon. In February Devieilhe returned to the studio, this time accompanied by Les Siècles, pianist Alexandre Tharaud and conductor François-Xavier Roth for a new concept album called *The Stranger*.

The album largely explores French Romantic repertoire, including arias from Delibes's *Lakmé*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Massenet's *Thaïs* and Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*. Devieilhe is joined by Tharaud for a number of songs, including Bizet's 'Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe', Berlioz's 'La mort d'Ophélie' and Koechlin's 'Le voyage'.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW MORGAN, DAVE HECHT

## Ray Chen scores second major-label deal by signing for Decca

**T**he ebullient young violinist Ray Chen has signed a new recording contract with Decca Classics, and celebrated by posting a characteristically irreverent YouTube video. Chen, who has a huge online following, is seen in the video at the Decca offices pestering employees in lifts and even toilets to listen to his playing, before eventually succeeding in impressing them into offering him a deal.

Chen, 27, said of the new contract: 'I'm super stoked to be joining forces with the awesome team at Decca Classics. We'll be working together on a variety of projects which include the recordings of classic repertoire that everyone loves but I'm happy that I'll have a partner which will help boost the multimedia side of things too.'

This is Ray Chen's second major record deal after three critically acclaimed albums with Sony Classical. His Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky concertos disc with Daniel Harding and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra was a *Gramophone* Recording of the Month in June 2012.

Since winning the Yehudi Menuhin competition in 2008, Chen has been a sought-after soloist, performing with orchestras including the Gewandhaus, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Rotterdam Philharmonic.

Alexander Buhr, Managing Director of Decca Classics, said of his new signing: 'Not only is he a terrific performer with stunning virtuosity, he is also an extraordinary communicator – on stage, on record and online.'



Ray Chen (left) with Alexander Buhr of Decca

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## LEONTYNE PRICE AT 90

The great American soprano Leontyne Price turns 90 this year, and to celebrate we've gathered together interviews and features from the *Gramophone* archive, including Alan Blyth's classic encounter with the singer from 1971, during which she said: 'It's terrible but



you know I just love the sound of my own voice. Sometimes I simply move myself to tears. I suppose I must be my own best fan. I don't care if that sounds immodest – I feel that all singers must enjoy the sound they make if they're to have others enjoy it too.'

## PODCAST: THE PIANO MUSIC OF VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Martin Cullingford met up with pianist Mark Bebbington to discuss his new disc of Vaughan Williams's little-known piano works, including transcriptions of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and *Fantasia on Greensleeves*.

## WE WANT YOUR VIEWS!

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# A lasting LEGACY

Rostropovich's recordings defined the catalogue but, finds Michael McManus, it was with the works written for the cellist, who died 10 years ago, that he changed the cello's repertoire forever

**T**oday, it's hard to imagine how little prominence the cello enjoyed as a solo instrument just a century ago. When the first cellist to emerge as a '20th-century superstar', Pablo Casals, listed his repertoire in 1910, he named just seven concertos for cello and orchestra. That number would more than double during Casals's lifetime, but it was not he who would raise the cello to new heights to sit proudly alongside the violin and the piano as a genuine equal. The elevation of the instrument to the standing it now enjoys is almost entirely the achievement of another remarkable man, for whom the hackneyed epithet 'larger than life' might most appositely have been coined: Mstislav 'Slava' Rostropovich, who was born in Baku 90 years ago and died in Moscow 80 years and one month later. Through an inspired, even divine, admixture of charisma and charm, energy and determination, innate musicianship and sheer technical ability, this cellist changed not only music but the world. For almost half a century, no composer of note produced a major composition for the cello without having him in mind. In a programme note for the LSO in 1994, Rostropovich wrote that 'whilst it was my cello professors who taught me my technique...it was the composers whom I sought for my musical training'. For him, the cello repertoire was not a given, but a body of work to be challenged, advocated and, above all else, expanded at all costs.

Two attractive box-sets mark this year's double anniversary. Both give due prominence to repertoire that Rostropovich inspired and introduced to the world. The first, from Universal, collects together his recordings for Philips, DG and Decca. Its principal focus is his extraordinary range of recordings of music from the Classical and Romantic eras, though his indispensable recordings of Britten are included too. Also inside are a number of Westminster recordings, some of which have been prized rarities for years. The second, from Warner Classics, offers his later recordings for Teldec and much of his work for EMI, including the legendary and indispensable 'Russian Recordings', first released in 1997. Legend has it that Rostropovich had these recordings in a plastic bag, which he brought to Abbey Road on the off-chance they might be of interest to someone. They include numerous live recordings of premiere performances,

*'For Rostropovich, music wasn't about perfection, but about the immediacy of expression, passion, drama, life'* – Alban Gerhardt

including works by Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Britten. When I asked Rostropovich about the 1997 set, he looked at me with tears in his eyes. 'All the good people are dead,' he said, with profound feeling. No more needed to be said.

By the time he ceased to play the cello in public, Rostropovich had premiered around 120 pieces on the cello, over half of which were pieces for cello and orchestra; in addition, he conducted 70 inaugural performances of orchestral works. Some of these pieces were commissioned for Rostropovich, others dedicated to him, others yet commissioned directly by him. They range from undisputed masterpieces to works that have been interred by posterity (mercifully in many cases – the Concerto in C by Tikhon Khrennikov being a case in point), from the neoclassical to the neoromantic, from the highly musically conservative and accessible to the ground-breaking avant-garde. What unites them all is that, in every instance, Rostropovich had significantly, or even dramatically, enriched the composer's appreciation of

the expressive potential of the cello. Without this great body of work, today's repertoire in both concert halls and recital rooms would be severely denuded: the list of those who dedicated and entrusted pieces to Rostropovich is a comprehensive 'who's who' of a musical era.

According to the German cellist Alban Gerhardt, whose new disc of 'Rostropovich Encores' was an Editor's Choice in January: 'Rostropovich really made the cello what it is now – this popular instrument. That's why I think he will forever be the most wonderful and most important cellist, cello personality and musician-cellist...I am upset because today we don't have someone like that, who's really pushing composers to write great pieces for the cello. No one takes pieces, then really establishes them, as Rostropovich did. He was such a complete musician. It wasn't about perfection, more about the immediacy of expression and passion and drama and life – what music should be about.'

Rostropovich was a performer in every sense, who understood just how to engage with an audience and gain its undivided attention, even before a single note had been played. Karine Georgian studied with him in the 1970s and explains: 'There is no "Rostropovich method" as such. His emphasis was upon sound production, expressivity and connection with colours.



Rostropovich (left) with Prokofiev in 1952; he supported the composer when he was denounced for 'formalism'



Rostropovich with Shostakovich in 1975; he studied composition with Shostakovich at the Moscow Conservatory

He taught us to have clarity in our musical intentions – to play every concert as though it were our last and to ask ourselves why we were going onto a stage at all. When I was preparing with him for a competition, before I could play a note, he sent me back out of the room. He did this seven times. “This is not superficial,” he told me. “You have to rehearse how you go onto the stage. Remember, with your first step you are already on stage and you have to be aware of that. Whatever you project from that moment is all part of one thing.”

In the 1963–64 season, in Moscow, during a series of 11 concerts, Rostropovich performed almost every significant

concerto for the cello – 44 works in all, including 14 that had been composed specifically with him in mind. There was also a splendid re-orchestration of his favourite concerto from the Romantic era – that of Robert Schumann – undertaken by Shostakovich, at his request. Variants of this marathon were then repeated elsewhere – in Leningrad that same season, then in London and then in New York, where new American compositions by Walter Piston and Lukas Foss were added to the repertoire. In all of these legendary marathons, new works – written expressly for Rostropovich – jostled with the more familiar repertoire. These concerts were celebrations of living music, not museum pieces. Furthermore, if Slava had to work hard, so too did his audience.

Elizabeth Wilson also studied with Rostropovich in Moscow in the 1970s and her excellent book *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend* was published by Faber in 2007. She told me recently how ‘Slava’s incredible energy, fantastic memory and lightning reactions made him an ideal performer of new music’. That is no overstatement. As she reminded me: ‘Of the over 100 cello works written by composers worldwide for Rostropovich, not all have found a lasting place in the repertoire, but the majority of “surviving” pieces for cello written in the second half of the 20th century owe their creation – and their survival – to Rostropovich’s dedication and enthusiasm for his instrument. This can be better understood when one recalls Rostropovich’s exhortation to Lutosławski as the composer set out to write his cello concerto: “When you write, don’t think of the cello. I am the cello.”’

Mstislav Rostropovich’s story began unpromisingly. Even to come into this world at all, he had to survive a 10-month incubation and determined attempts at abortion. Then the Second World War necessitated evacuation to his maternal family town of Oranenburg, where his father died when he was just 14. At 16, he was back in Moscow, thanks to a special dispensation, winning

a Gold Medal in the USSR Competition for Young Musicians at the age of just 18 and graduating from the Conservatory a few months later. His virtuosity was matched by his ambition. He rapidly acquired prestigious teaching positions in Moscow and Leningrad and, from the outset, new music was at the heart of his activities. As word of his extraordinary talent as a performer spread, inevitably it was not long before he became the muse to composers of genius. The first of these was Shostakovich, whom he always revered and whose composition class he joined at the Conservatory. In his early years, Rostropovich was a highly productive composer, but immersive



Karine Georgian studied with Rostropovich for seven years in Moscow

exposure to the works of contemporary greats such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich (he attended the premieres of their Fifth and Eighth Symphonies, respectively) persuaded him he would do better to dedicate himself to playing. As a composer, he could never match them.

Rostropovich met Prokofiev fleetingly during his time at the Conservatory and afterwards, but engaged seriously with him for the first time in January 1948, after the composer heard

*As word of his extraordinary talent as a performer spread, it was not long before he became the muse to composers of genius*

him play his almost forgotten Cello Concerto, accompanied by a piano. Just weeks later, Prokofiev was one of the musicians denounced for ‘formalism’ in the notorious Zhdanov Decree. For Rostropovich this was a great opportunity, ‘because Prokofiev lost 90 per cent of his friends and I became his confidant’. The cellist became a frequent visitor to Prokofiev’s dacha. First Prokofiev wrote a fine Cello Sonata for him, which Rostropovich premiered in 1950, with Sviatoslav Richter at the piano; and then together they reworked the Cello Concerto, giving it new life, first as a Second Cello Concerto (Richter conducting the premiere in 1952) and then as the fine Symphony-Concerto, Op 125. Sadly, Prokofiev was destined to die in March 1953, on the same day as his tormentor Stalin, and never heard that final iteration performed in public.

Elizabeth Wilson recalls that, for composers, ‘Rostropovich was an irresistible force; the ideal performer...He had studied composition at the Moscow Conservatory and chose the newly written concerto by Nikolai Myaskovsky to play at the prestigious All-Union Competition. Three years later, Myaskovsky dedicated to him his Second Cello Sonata, which in turn inspired Prokofiev to compose his own Cello Sonata for him. Prokofiev had no qualms about writing horribly difficult passages in a work exclusively designed for Rostropovich’s skills, saying, “Let other cellists be less lazy and learn to play.”’

The second of Rostropovich’s great working relationships was with Dmitri Shostakovich, with whom he had studied in Moscow. The cellist was desperate for Shostakovich to compose a piece for his instrument, but the composer’s wife



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warned him never to ask for such a thing directly. Despite his misgivings, Rostropovich heeded her advice. In 1958 he learned Shostakovich had composed a Cello Concerto and feared its premiere might be entrusted to another cellist. Then he received a summons to visit Shostakovich. He rushed to him and fell in love with the piece at once, accepting the composer's dedication of it to him without hesitation. He took the score away and worked intensively on it for four days. When he returned to Shostakovich to play the piece to him, the composer offered to fetch a music stand. He didn't need one: he had learned the piece by heart: 'I was never so proud in my life.' The piece became his most remarkable calling card for the next four decades or more. In the words of Elizabeth Wilson, he 'performed the work as if his life depended on it'. In due course, Shostakovich would also compose a second concerto for him – a more introverted piece, but just as fine. Rostropovich also championed the composer's symphonies as a conductor.

*'The astonishing virtuosity of Slava's playing was just unlike anything anyone had ever heard before'* – Moray Welsh

In 1960, Rostropovich gave the London premiere of the Shostakovich Cello Concerto, with the composer in attendance. Sitting next to Shostakovich in the Festival Hall was Benjamin Britten. Rostropovich had heard about Britten and knew some of his music, but had imagined him to be either dead or, at the very least, very old. When he met him, he realised Britten was a man at the height of his powers; almost at once, he became a friend for life. The cellist had been a young neophyte when he met Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but now he was an established, international artist. The day after that concert, he met Britten again; inspired by what he heard, the composer soon wrote his Cello Sonata, specifically for Rostropovich. Subject though they were to the vicissitudes of the international political situation,



Rostropovich plays next to the Berlin Wall as it is torn down in November 1989



Close friends and collaborators: Rostropovich with composer Benjamin Britten

the visits of Rostropovich to Aldeburgh soon became the stuff of legend and, in March 1964, Britten conducted the premiere of the Cello Symphony not in England but in the Soviet Union, with Rostropovich as soloist. By skilful legerdemain, the cellist also cajoled three Solo Suites out of Britten. The story goes that, as they travelled together to meet the Princess Royal, Rostropovich told Britten how he intended to curtsey very elaborately to Her Royal Highness, then genuflect. Britten begged him not to do anything of the sort. Slava acceded to the composer's request, but extracted in return a written promise from him to write three more cello pieces. It was honoured.

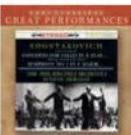
Another student of Rostropovich was Moray Welsh, who went on to lead the cello section of the LSO. When I spoke to him, he observed that the mixed reception enjoyed by Rostropovich's first (and only) studio recording of the Bach Solo Suites, made when he was in his sixties, may have tainted people's perception of his talent as a performer: 'In his prime, there was no one who could play as well as he could. When I first heard him in Edinburgh playing the Bach, it was incredible. Had he lived longer, he might have assimilated changes in playing style more. However, with all the pieces that were written for him in his heyday, the astonishing virtuosity of his playing was just unlike anything anyone had ever heard before...he had people in the palm of his hand.' Welsh also provided insights into Rostropovich's unorthodox teaching methods: 'He could be very funny – satirical in his mimicry – but he could also be very severe, and very demanding technically. There was a piano accompanist, but he would pounce onto a second keyboard, accompanying the accompanist. All the lessons were in class, with the other students present. There were listeners too: the classes were a bit of a circus event. There was no concept of a "private lesson".'

Rostropovich lived a madly demanding and hectic life and he was fortunate that he could rely upon a phenomenal physical

constitution. He was (literally) an all-embracing extrovert, both a democrat and a demagogue, loveable and yet ruthless too, capable of displaying disarming kindness and generosity but also insecure, vain and stubborn. He lived his life with and through grand gestures. He played Bach by the Berlin Wall as it was smashed to smithereens and returned to Moscow to support Boris Yeltsin when recidivist Communist hard-liners attempted a coup against him. Yet in his later days he would defend the hard line Moscow took against rogue provinces such as Chechnya. As his playing technique deteriorated in his later years, you never knew which Rostropovich you were going to encounter, musically as well as spiritually, but for all his manifest imperfections, he remained the truest of friends to Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Britten – he was their most passionate and compelling advocate. Mstislav Rostropovich was an infinite conundrum, putting one in mind of Churchill's description of Stalin's Soviet Union: 'A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.' He was not only the world's finest cellist in terms of technical ability, he was also its premier showman and its greatest ever ambassador. He was both a genius himself and an incomparable muse to genius. That is why, 10 years after his death, his legacy remains unsurpassed. **G**

## WRITTEN FOR ROSTROPOVICH

Four classic recordings from the inspirational cellist



### Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 1

Rostropovich vc Philadelphia Orchestra / Ormandy  
Sony Classical (9/60)

Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto is the most popular of the major pieces written for Rostropovich. There are numerous live recordings available featuring the cellist and he took the piece into the studio twice, but the recording he made in a Philadelphia hotel with Eugene Ormandy in 1959 remains unsurpassed, by him or by anyone else.



### Prokofiev Symphony-Concerto

Rostropovich vc RPO / Sargent  
Warner Classics (12/66)

Prokofiev's Cello Concerto gave the composer a rare taste of failure. With Rostropovich, he reworked the piece into the much more successful *Symphony-Concerto*. The cellist made several fine recordings, but his 1957 recording with Malcolm Sargent is as good as any.



### Britten Cello Suites Nos 1 and 2

Rostropovich vc  
Decca (8/89)

Benjamin Britten wrote a Cello Sonata and three Cello Suites for Rostropovich, who recorded just the first two of the suites, seemingly finding the Third Suite – which he premiered at Snape in December 1974 – too intensely personal to be shared with a wider public in this way.



### Lutosławski Cello Concerto

Rostropovich vc Orchestre de Paris / Lutosławski  
Warner Classics (2/76)

Rostropovich premiered Witold Lutosławski's Cello Concerto in London in 1970, with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edward Downes. Although the composer resisted such analysis, the concerto creates an unmistakably confrontational relationship between orchestra and soloist and therefore feels unusually political, with the cello being 'bullied' by the orchestra. In lieu of the recording of that premiere (long overdue for commercial release), Slava's studio recording from 1974 is indispensable.

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HARRISON BIRTWISTLE



# A COMPOSER'S TALE

When Harrison Birtwistle agreed to participate in a recording of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, he was acknowledging a deeply creative connection with the composer, writes Kate Molleson

**W**hen Igor Stravinsky wrote his autobiography of 1936, he articulated a claim that would end up being skewed, misconstrued and chucked back at him throughout his life. It was his theory of anti-expression, of music's inherent emotional sterility, of listeners' outmoded romantic habits of ascribing meaning rather than simply loving music for music's sake. 'I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all,' he wrote. 'If music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality. It is simply an additional attribute which, by tacit and inveterate agreement, we have lent it, thrust upon it.'

Eighty years later, at his kitchen table in Wiltshire on a midwinter afternoon, Sir Harrison Birtwistle is expounding on similar themes. The 82-year-old composer says he doesn't believe in consciously expressing something – that expression comes in spite of oneself. Another thing he doesn't believe in is inspiration. 'You hear it all the time in the media: what was your inspiration? What it probably means is that you filched it from someone else. I think of it as something like the draft from under the door. It's not conscious.' Perhaps inspiration filters through, whether he likes it or not?

He ignores the question, or rather answers it in a roundabout way by talking about place. 'This thing about being English is interesting because, if anything, for so much of my career, I consciously tried to write music that was not English – I mean to do with landscape and pastoralism and Vaughan Williams and all that.' Does he believe he was born with everything he would write already in him? 'Probably,' he shrugs. 'I wouldn't be so pretentious as to say something like that. But yes, the thing that I had back when I started out, what made me do it, that's what's been making me do it all along. It has different guises, it manifests itself in different forms. Chameleon-like, I suppose. But I think it's all the same, what I'm doing.'

Self-styled radicals, iconoclastic rule-breakers who shirked tradition with a capital 'T' but remain enthralled by old myths and folk rites, Birtwistle's links to Stravinsky are deep and multi-directional. In so many of his stage works – *Punch and Judy*, *Down by the Greenwood Side*, *Yan Tan Tethera*, *The Mask of Orpheus*, *Gawain*, *The Last Supper*, *The Minotaur*,

more – Birtwistle returns to Stravinskian tropes. The rough rituals and how those rituals are exploded or re-routed. The earthy primitivism merged with sophisticated, unflinching violence. The intrigue in collective experience over the individual. The archaic and archetypal characters, street theatre, pantomime, fables, brazen repetition, episodic dramas.

And while he might not believe in inspiration, Birtwistle does acknowledge that his music 'came much more from the

side of Varèse and Stravinsky than it did from Schoenberg and atonalism'. During a concert given by Klangforum Wien at the 2013 Salzburg Festival, the composer sat alone on stage, in silence, facing out to the audience, while

the musicians played his *Tombeau in memoriam Igor Stravinsky* (1971) from the organ loft at the back of the church. It is a tiny work for flute, clarinet, harp and string quartet with a three-chord refrain that repeats and repeats. It is an evocation, a ritual, a rite, and that little gesture of performance art was in itself a silent tribute of sorts.

Now Birtwistle has come at Stravinsky from another angle: he has recorded the role of the Soldier in *The Soldier's Tale*, with George Benjamin as the Devil and Oliver Knussen conducting soloists from the Royal Academy of Music. It's an exquisitely deadpan performance. With his laconic Lancashire drawl, Birtwistle's Soldier is not the peppy upstart of some interpretations nor the gullible dreamer or cocksure lad of others. His Soldier is jaded, glum, dispassionate, and the effect is marvellous against Benjamin's honeyed and slightly neurotic Devil. There is a world-weariness that suggests his descent is more knowing than it often appears. Perhaps his Soldier chooses his own fate all along: perhaps he is re-rehearsing an old tale, the oldest in the book, just to see what might happen.

'There are two ways of telling a story,' Birtwistle has said. 'One is to tell it because people don't know it, and the other is to tell it like a child's story, to retell it.' His own approach to narrative turns the brutal, sacred, profane and elemental into Stravinsky-like fables. He claims to be 'not a very psychological person', that he doesn't 'get off on all that'. As subject matter for operas, he is drawn to myths and legends, to 'stories we all know. When setting a myth, set a known myth, otherwise nobody knows what's going on. As a composer, my duty is illuminating the story.'



'Tombeau in memoriam Igor Stravinsky' at the 2013 Salzburg Festival; recording *The Soldier's Tale* with conductor Oliver Knussen and narrator Dame Harriet Walter

Birtwistle's conversation flip-flops between pithy scepticism and morose self-doubt. He tells me about writing his 1997 orchestral piece *Exody* in response to a poem by Robin Blaser. 'It's not very good,' he sums up. 'It didn't realise my dreams! That's everything I do. Sometimes I get six out of 10, sometimes I get two.' Never 10? 'I wouldn't be so bold. Only Beethoven gets 10.' So when I ask why he became involved in recording *The Soldier's Tale*, he waves a hand dismissively.

'They asked me to do it. I didn't want to at first. For one thing, I can't stand my own voice.' He concedes that 'it was nice' being in Aldeburgh with Knussen. 'He is a friend of mine. And I wrote some pieces for Stravinsky, and they recorded those too.'

Did the reading make him feel any closer to Stravinsky? 'Nah,' he snorts, so I try a different tack. In past interviews, I venture, he has described having to struggle with the same issues that Stravinsky had to struggle with in terms of his place in the contemporary music scene. 'I would say it's more complicated than that,' he glances up. 'Stravinsky was the avant-garde. The music I was born into, the music I was writing, it wasn't coming from the same starting position.' He pauses. 'Oh, this is difficult.'

But he carries on. 'I always had a music in my head. Even when I was playing clarinet aged eight. That music is still what comes out now – not that it's the same music, just that I always had an idea of what I wanted music to be, and I thought it could be expressed. It comes back to the myth of tradition. We don't come from nowhere, we don't come from the moon.' Stravinsky didn't come from the moon either, I point out. 'No, true,' he admits. 'His relationship to music history was very much part of the tradition, in a way. I felt much more radical about it, but



I didn't know how to do it. I still don't know how to do it. I don't know if I knew what the word "radical" was. Maybe it's called naivety. I know that originally I had some crazy ideas, but I didn't know they were crazy when I was doing them. They were pretty crazy in retrospect...'

We discuss his favourite Stravinsky works. Stravinsky is so many things, he says. 'What would we think of him if he hadn't written *The Rite* or *Petrushka*?' There would be a lot less to latch on to easily,

I suggest. 'Right. There would be the neoclassical thing, and the late stuff when he felt he had missed out and got all ritualistic. There's that wonderful piece called *Agnon*, which I love. You can understand how he arrived at those pieces at the end of his life. It became very serial and lean, very few notes.'

He recalls attending the lectures of Milton Babbitt at Princeton in the mid-1960s. 'Combinatoriality!' he laughs. 'He talked about it all the time. I had no idea what he was on about. Not a clue. I went for the whole semester. He was incomprehensible, and his students were even worse. And then suddenly it all became minimal. One of them ended up in G major! Whoops. And in all those lectures he never mentioned an actual piece of music once. One day he was talking about Stravinsky's sets – he claimed he had taught him about serialism – and he asked, "Any of you know what this set is?" And there was silence. Nobody knew who I was, but I piped up. "Yeah, I know what it is. It's the last note of the *Huxley Variations*." I was very proud of that.'

Now Birtwistle admits he is grateful to Stravinsky and Varèse for somehow tethering his youthful radicalism. He says today we are in 'a very difficult position' in relation to postmodernism and the attitude that anything goes. 'I would hate to be a 25-year-old



A scene from Birtwistle's *Gawain*, again at the Salzburg Festival in 2013



East Lancashire military band, aged 13

to me which star I belonged to. Intuitively. Now there's too much. I don't know what I would do.'

What does he think of music being written now? 'It doesn't interest me very much.' What should be done? 'What I'm doing! As long as I'm the only one who's doing it. I might tell you that I find writing music now a lot more difficult than I used to. I'm a lot slower.' Now his music is, he says, 'much more fractured'. When we meet, he is in the process of working on a piece for piano (Nicolas Hodges) and percussion (Colin Currie) that involves six keyboards: piano, prepared piano, celeste, vibraphone, marimba, xylophone. Why that formation? 'Why paint the sunset?' he smiles. Is there a subject matter? 'The piece itself is the subject matter!' he says, grinning. And we're back to Stravinsky, and to loving music for music's sake. **G**

To read Gramophone's review of *The Soldier's Tale*, turn to page 79

## BARNSTORMING BIRTWISTLE

Four recommended recordings to explore



### Punch and Judy

Soloists; London Sinfonietta / David Atherton  
NMC (9/07)

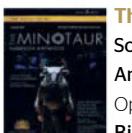
Birtwistle's 1960s breakthrough work - a 'rude gesture in the face of Aldeburgh primness' - recorded with adept care in 1979. Stephen Roberts's portrayal of Mr Punch as a demented Oxbridge choral scholar is stunning; David Wilson-Johnson is a creepily suave Master of Ceremonies.



### The Triumph of Time. Earth Dances. Panic

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Davis  
Ensemble Modern Orchestra / Pierre Boulez  
Decca

Definitive performances of three major orchestral pieces spanning the early-1970s *The Triumph of Time* to the blistering 1995 Proms commission *Panic*.



**The Minotaur**  
Soloists; Orchestra & Chorus of the Royal Opera House / Antonio Pappano  
Opus Arte DVD (1/09)

Birtwistle's mythic setting of a David Harsent libretto, recorded live in 2008 with searing orchestral playing and gripping performances from John Tomlinson and the rest of the cast.



**Refrains and Choruses**  
Richard Shaw pf Galliard Ensemble  
Deux-Elles (1/01)  
Intimate, subtle and intricate, this is a beautiful disc exploring Birtwistle's rituals and repetitions on a small scale. Includes the *Duets for Storab*, *Ockooing Bird* and *Chorale* from a Toy-Shop.

## OPUS ARTE

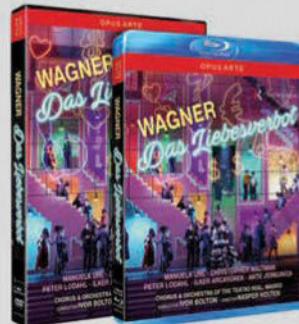
### FRANKENSTEIN

SCARLETT/LIEBERMANN  
Royal Opera House



Royal Ballet Principals Federico Bonelli, Laura Morera and Steven McRae dance the lead roles in Liam Scarlett's new ballet, based on the world's most famous work of horror fiction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Scarlett's choreography draws out the emotional power of this classic story.

**DVD | BLU-RAY**

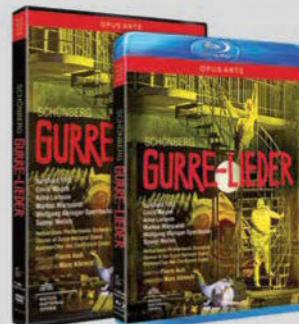


### DAS LIEBESVERBOT

WAGNER  
Teatro Real

Wagner's rarely performed early comic opera, based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, enjoys its Spanish debut in a new production by director Kasper Holten. Ivor Bolton conducts a vibrant cast which includes Germany's hottest Wagnerian leading lady, Manuela Uhl.

**DVD | BLU-RAY**



### GURRE-LIEDER

SCHÖNBERG  
Dutch National Opera

This setting of the mediaeval Danish legend of Gurre Castle - a love triangle between King Waldemar, his mistress Tove and a jealous Queen - gains an innovative new dimension in this first-ever staging of the work, directed by Pierre Audi.

**DVD | BLU-RAY**



### HANDEL

GIULIO CESARE  
RINALDO · SAUL  
Glyndebourne

This set brings together three of Handel's most compelling works for the stage in lavish Glyndebourne productions featuring period-instrument accompaniment from the renowned Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. David McVicar, Robert Carsen and Barrie Kosky direct.

**5 DVD | 4 BLU-RAY SET**

# A young artist's LIFE IN SONG

On his first Sony Classical album, baritone Benjamin Appl tells his life story...so far.  
James Jolly meets with Gramophone's current Young Artist of the Year

**B**anking's loss is most definitely the music world's gain. The baritone Benjamin Appl, who followed his two elder brothers into Regensburg's famous boys' choir, the Domspatzen, before graduating to the senior choir, took a couple of years away from music to study in the banking sector. 'It went OK and I liked it, so then I started to study business administration. But a year later I decided to have some professional voice lessons, just for fun. I auditioned at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Munich, and also in Augsburg, because I wanted to study with Edith Wiens who taught at both music colleges – and I got a place in both. I thought I'd continue to study business administration and see how long I could study singing as well. But more and more I turned to the world of singing and, after my diploma in business administration in 2009, I moved to London to do a Masters here at the Guildhall School with Rudolf Piernay. At the time, I was still thinking of doing a PhD in business administration while studying in London, but that idea is now far, far away!'

Appl, who was named *Gramophone's* Young Artist of the Year in 2016, has just notched up another milestone in his professional life, the release of his first recording (for which he is joined by pianist James Baillieu) as part of a new contract with Sony Classical. No stranger to British audiences, thanks to his membership of the BBC's New Generation Artists scheme, he already has two solo discs to his name, the first on Champs Hill, again accompanied by Baillieu and including Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, and then, with Graham Johnson, a solo Schubert recital on Wigmore Hall Live, both of which steered him towards that *Gramophone* Award. He was also, in 2015, a Rising Star in the annual scheme hosted by ECHO (the European Concert Hall Association).

'*Heimat*' is the title Appl has given his Sony Classical album, a term understood innately by Germans, but less easy to render simply in English, though literally it means 'homeland'. It's very difficult to define, as I think it's very personal to everyone. The concept of *Heimat* contains so many different aspects. In English, homeland is just the place

but *Heimat* is more than that, it's about belonging. For me, it's also about my roots: where I come from and the people around me, family, and people who are, or were, important to me – and there's also a musical *Heimat*, and a religious *Heimat*. Where you belong is important, and that's why I thought it was a nice title for bringing together songs which are important to me. Through these songs, I can also explain a little bit of my background, that I grew up in Germany in the German song tradition, but then also at the end of the disc I can have a few English songs to represent my new home.'

For Appl, there are some deeply personal connections in the programme. And he wants people who are new to song to find it approachable because it tells his story, often quite specifically. 'There are sections where I focus on people who are important to me so, for example, there is Schubert's "Nachtstück" which is about an old man deciding he wants to die

and he goes into a forest. Death comes from behind him, embraces him and he dies in his arms. I don't know about coincidences but the day after my grandfather died I had a rehearsal in the morning with James and we started with this song. Or Richard Strauss's "Allerseelen": I have a special connection to it because I sang it in a concert in Switzerland. The programme had already been long decided but my grandmother had died shortly before (six weeks after my grandfather). It was the first concert my parents came over for after she died, and it was a very emotional moment. So many of these songs recall the people who were important or part of me.'

Putting such a programme together requires an extensive knowledge of the Lieder and song repertoire, and Appl credits both Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Graham Johnson for encouraging exploration. Both men advised him to learn a large number of songs early on, and to keep expanding his repertoire. He was Fischer-Dieskau's last pupil and, unlike some singers who worked with the great German baritone, Appl has nothing but admiration. 'On one hand, of course I'm very proud and I'm so thankful that I had this opportunity, but on the other hand it shouldn't look like I'm using it as a kind of calling card. He was a very wonderful singer, and working with him was also very interesting in that I never had the feeling that he wanted

*'The concept of "Heimat" contains so many different aspects. In English, homeland is just the place but "Heimat" is more than that, it's about belonging'* – Benjamin Appl





Brahms's *Triumphlied* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Marin Alsop at the 2015 BBC Proms

his pupils to sound like him. He took your ability, your voice, and worked from there, and I was very happy. Also, because of my studies in business administration, I met him, not at the beginning, as a very young singer, but a little bit later.' Being older helped him to avoid a trap younger singers can often fall into: 'I think when you work with great singers, there's always a tendency to imitate,' he says. And it's presumably even more of a temptation with a singer because imitation is so much more obvious? 'Absolutely. You need your own personality – it has to be your own way of delivering.'

**W**ith both Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Edith Wiens, Appl worked on all aspects of song, right down to how to stand on stage. 'Every week, singers in Edith's class had to come together and perform a song or an aria. The others sat in front and afterwards everyone had to say one positive thing and one negative. So you also learned how to criticise people in a very supportive way. We also filmed it and afterwards we went to the TV room and she sat in front of the screen and said "This hand here looks strange" or "Do you see what your mouth is doing here?" The first few weeks I remember it was completely terrifying, but in the end it was very helpful. Of course, you shouldn't stand on stage and think "Which arm should I move now?" or "Does it look strange?". You should feel very comfortable and be very natural.'

A concert at the Oxford Lieder Festival late last year saw Appl perform a couple of melodramas (spoken words to a piano accompaniment) by Schumann, and he not only completely owned the stage (not hard when you're that tall!) but demonstrated an actor's ability to work with words, a level of declamatory expression that clearly betrayed the Fischer-Dieskau mentorship in the best possible light. 'It's very different and difficult speaking, and it's also quite tiring. When you have to speak between songs in

a recital, which is more common in this country and even more so in the States, I find it vocally more challenging than singing. Frankly, I'd much prefer to sing an entire programme than say a few words between songs!'

**W**hen Appl arrived to study in the UK seven years ago, he freely admits that his English was not great. If you listen to the handful of English songs on 'Heimat', or speak to him, he has acquired an ease with the language, not to mention a clarity of diction, that many native speakers would envy. But between the German and the English songs on the programme, there's a single one in French – Francis Poulenc's 'Hyde Park'. 'The idea was that after this long German section suddenly there's a short Poulenc piece where the musical

language is so different. It's in French and people should feel almost confused by it. I did it deliberately because the effect was rather like me coming from Bavaria, a calm, comfortable place, to London, this huge city, which is vibrant and with a different language – a bit confused and lost. I wanted people to say, "What's going on, why did he choose this?".'

At the moment, song sits at the centre of Benjamin Appl's schedule, with the occasional excursion into choral music – specifically the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms, Fauré and Duruflé, the Bach Passions and Britten's *War Requiem*. What about opera? 'I did quite a lot of opera productions as a student and a fair amount of contemporary music as well. But coming to London and then meeting Graham Johnson – and I was also working with Fischer-Dieskau at the time – everything was telling me that song was very, very important to me. Also, with the BBC New Generation Artists, though there was some orchestral work, it was mainly song. And the Echo Rising Stars tour was a recital series so the last two or three years especially have seen an absolute focus on song. There are so many wonderful young opera singers and it's very difficult to stand out from the crowd in the field, and the competition is definitely more international than in the song world. Song recitals require a lot of effort, but ultimately I think it's very important to do song, choral works and even opera, as all three art forms or singing types really enrich not only the imagination but also the voice.'

It's clear that the dramatis personae of Benjamin Appl's musical life is exceptionally rich – in the UK alone, he has worked with all our leading song-pianists – but there's another name that gives 'Heimat' a discreet though impressive lustre: the producer is none other than Torsten Schreier, the son of the great tenor and master Lieder singer Peter Schreier. You really couldn't ask for a better omen than that. **G**

► Benjamin Appl's 'Heimat' is reviewed on page 80



Moment of victory: the Gramophone Awards 2016

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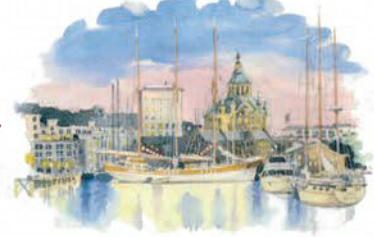
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# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger hails the completion of Vasily Petrenko's Tchaikovsky symphony cycle, with exceptionally fine playing from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



### Tchaikovsky

Symphonies - No 3, 'Polish', Op 29;  
No 4, Op 36; No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74  
**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /  
Vasily Petrenko**  
Onyx M ② ONYX4162 (118' • DDD)

This release completes Vasily Petrenko's impressive Tchaikovsky symphony cycle with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for Onyx, entirely living up to the early promise offered by last year's set of Nos 1, 2 and 5 (8/16), which was my nomination for Critics' Choice in 2016. Petrenko's fast and furious approach once again pays off with invigorating performances which dispel Russian gloom. The RLPO play their socks off and must rank as one of the finest 'Russian orchestras' in the UK today.

It's no surprise that Petrenko's Fourth is a white-knuckle ride, speedy with dramatic hairpin dynamics. The Liverpool brass are imposing in the opening 'Fate' fanfare, although not quite as abrasive as Yevgeny Mravinsky's Leningrad Phil, still the benchmark for the final three symphonies.

Petrenko bustles the movement along on waves of nervous anxiety and heart-on-sleeve emotion. The *cantabile* oboe in the second movement is beautifully sculpted but is always kept on the move. Petrenko leads a lightning fast pizzicato Scherzo – like dazzlingly executed pirouettes – interrupted by bucolic woodwinds. The finale bursts in and is helter-skelter fast, but never quite threatens to spiral out of control, whereas a frenzied Mravinsky teeters on the very brink.

Petrenko initially hurries into the *Pathétique*, although Semyon Bychkov finds more tension in his recent account, the Czech Philharmonic strings fretting



*This really is  
Tchaikovsky-playing  
that bursts with sunshine,  
the strings imitating  
strummed balalaikas'*

more urgently in the passages reminiscent of Herman's troubled mind in *The Queen of Spades*. Petrenko relaxes into the *Andante* section of the first movement (4'21"), just at the point where Bychkov sweeps forward – contrasting approaches.

After the clarinet and bass clarinet – no bassoon for the final four quavers of that

phrase – coil down to Tchaikovsky's notorious *pppppp* marking, the power Petrenko unleashes in the *Allegro vivo* which follows (at 9'47") is startling.

The lopsided 5/4 Waltz is slightly breathless – in an invigorating way – and the bushy-tailed March packs a tremendous punch. Petrenko launches straight into the finale, which is neither as fevered as Mravinsky's electrifying reading nor as fast as Bychkov's recent rethinking. It's movingly done, though, lower woodwinds and strings again impressing, brass building to a fine climax (8'09") before the steady decline and fade into oblivion.

The real joy in this set comes via the Third Symphony, dubiously nicknamed the *Polish* on account of its polacca finale. It's the least performed of Tchaikovsky's symphonies in concert. In fact, you're more likely to encounter it at the ballet than in the concert hall, as most of it is used as part of the score to Balanchine's *Jewels* (Diamonds) and MacMillan's *Anastasia*, both of which form part of The Royal Ballet's current season. It's easily the most dance-like of the composer's symphonies. Petrenko offers a coruscating reading, sparkling with imperial brilliance.

After a stately *marcia funebre* introduction, the *accelerando* into the *Allegro brillante* section (from 3'09") is full of anticipation, greeted by springy rhythms perfect for dancing. This really is Tchaikovsky-playing that bursts with sunshine, the strings imitating strummed balalaikas (7'25"). Petrenko makes Valery Gergiev's LSO Live account sound sluggish, with an especially thrilling first-movement coda (from 12'50").

Like Schumann's *Rhenish* Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Third is in five movements, which means there are two faster 'scherzo'-type



Petrenko keeps the music fluid, with a fine sense of its architecture



Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra: one of the finest 'Russian orchestras' in the UK today

inner movements. After the Third's premiere, Tchaikovsky modestly wrote to Rimsky-Korsakov: 'It seems to me that the Symphony does not present any particularly successful idea, but technically it's a step forward. Above all I'm satisfied with the first movement and both scherzos, the second of which is very difficult.' The *Alla tedesca* trips along daintily, carefree lines exchanged between flute and strings, while the RLPO woodwinds burble and ripple like a playful mountain stream in the jaunty *Allegro vivo* fourth movement. In between them, a lugubrious bassoon ponders in the *Andante elegiaco*, but Petrenko always keeps it fluid with a fine sense of the movement's sweeping architecture. The RLPO strings aren't as lush as their LSO counterparts but they

sound quite glorious here. There is plenty of pomp in the finale, but Petrenko never allows the brass to bludgeon.

Vladimir Jurowski and the London Philharmonic are in the midst of an excellent survey on their own label, with just the Second and Third to come. However, with his excellent *Manfred* on Naxos thrown in as a supplement, I commend Petrenko's as the finest modern cycle of Tchaikovsky's symphonies currently available. **Mark Pullinger**

*Symphonies Nos 4 & 6 – selected comparison:*  
Leningrad PO, Mravinsky (6/61<sup>st</sup>, 11/61<sup>st</sup>, 8/87)  
(DG) 419 745-2GH2  
*Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:*  
LSO, Gergiev (12/12) (LSO) LSO0710  
*Symphony No 6 – selected comparison:*  
Czech PO, Bychkov (10/16) (DECC) 483 0656

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#### Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Orchestral



Edward Seckerson enjoys Marin Alsop's Bernstein: *'The Age of Anxiety'* is a cracker of a piece and this excellent performance amplifies that view in every way' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 30**



Andrew Achenbach is swept away by the NYO's Holst Planets: *I love the string timbre in "Venus", and how giddily delirious are the xylophone's madcap antics during "Uranus"* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**

## Alnæs

Piano Concerto, Op 27<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 1, Op 7

**Håvard Gimse** pf

**Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Eivind Aadland**

LAWO Classics (LWC112) (70' • DDD)



Eyvind Alnæs's Piano Concerto (1915) has charm aplenty. The Norwegian composer's

score is tuneful and opulently orchestrated, and the virtuosic piano-writing is often dazzling. It's impressive for its craftsmanship, too, the myriad ideas developed and interwoven with a sure hand. What's disconcerting is an occasionally jarring juxtaposition of mood and emotion. Listen to the end of the first movement's central development section (beginning around 8'15"), for example, and how Alnæs screws the tension tighter and tighter, building a climax of Tchaikovskian intensity that leads to nothing more than a flippant recapitulation of the opening theme. Or take the end of the darkly lyrical slow movement, where an even more gripping climax this time subsides into eerie stillness – a spell that's rudely broken by the ditzy waltz theme of the finale. The result of these ill-fitting joins is a patchwork effect that undermines the work's structural integrity and narrative coherence.

This is the second recording of Alnæs's concerto, and while excellent, it's perhaps a touch sober in comparison with the joyous exuberance of Piers Lane and Andrew Litton (Hyperion). Håvard Gimse conveys a delightful sense of improvisatory freedom in some passages but Lane makes the complex piano part flow more easily, giving the music a much-needed feeling of inevitability.

Alnæs's First Symphony (1897), composed following his studies with Reinecke in Leipzig, is less characterful but more cohesive than the concerto. The two inner movements are very fine, particularly the solemnly expressive *Adagio* with its

aching harmonies and inventive orchestration (try at 6'15", where the upper strings are divided into delicate strands). Certainly Eivind Aadland and the Oslo Philharmonic make a more compelling case for this work than Terje Mikkelsen and the Latvian National Symphony (Sterling), and LAWO's close-up recording adds to the musical impact. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Piano Concerto – comparative version:*

*Lane, Bergen PO, Litton (6/07) (HYPE) CDA67555*

*Symphony No 1 – comparative version:*

*Latvian Nat SO, Mikkelsen (6/10) (STER) CDS1084-2*

## Alwyn

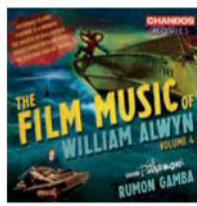
'The Film Music of William Alwyn, Vol 4'

Music from *The Black Tent*<sup>a</sup>, *A City Speaks*, *Fortune is a Woman*<sup>a</sup>, *The Master of Ballantrae*<sup>a</sup>, *Miranda*<sup>b</sup>, *On Approval*<sup>a</sup>, *Saturday Island*<sup>a</sup>, *Shake Hands With the Devil*<sup>a</sup>, *The Ship that Died of Shame* and *They Flew Alone*<sup>a</sup> (ed Philip Lane)

**Charlotte Trepass** sop

**BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Rumon Gamba**

Chandos (CHAN10930) (78' • DDD)



William Alwyn composed these film scores between 1941 and 1959, when a visit to the cinema was a twice-weekly event for many UK citizens, with attendance levels that have never been surpassed.

In *The Black Tent* (1956), filmed in Technicolor and VistaVision, the audience could be whisked from suburbia to a foreign location like Libya, where shooting took place. Alwyn's score was typical of his cinematic craft. Eschewing the flamboyant approach of a Tiomkin, Alwyn devised music that portrayed events on screen in a pithy, no-nonsense fashion without resorting to cliché. In this Suite his cues, often carrying a dense narrative, proceed in a cogent fashion, as with the Nocturne and Finale, where the drama and romance of the desert are inspired by Arabic music.

Adventure films dominate this fourth CD of Alwyn's music. *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953), from the novel by Robert Louis

Stevenson, is in a Scottish idiom, while *Shake Hands With the Devil*, a dramatic tale of the Black and Tans and the IRA, contains a little idyll for strings alone, 'People of Erin'. A sombre, fully scored funeral march ('Trouble') rounds off this Suite. 'The Mermaid's Song' from *Miranda*, a vocalise sung by the soprano Charlotte Trepass with full-bodied tone, provides an apt contrast, along with a Chopin-style Nocturne, played by pianist Paul James, in Alwyn's *They Flew Alone*, a biopic of Amy Johnson. The sweeping Prelude from *Saturday Island* (1952) demonstrates again how the change from major to minor is such an effective musical device, while *Fortune is a Woman* is dominated by a three-bar motif at the start.

Philip Lane has once again reconstructed and arranged much of this music, with the notable exception of the 'Manchester Suite' from *A City Speaks*. In this instance Alwyn presented his five-movement score to the film-makers in advance of the production, directed by Philip Rotha and commissioned by Manchester City Council. It was conducted on the original soundtrack by Barbirolli with the Hallé Orchestra. Alwyn's score illustrates Manchester's citizens at work and at play. There's an aspirational vision of a better life to come in the *Alla marcia* and a gritty determination to put it into practice in the Interlude. A fleeting Scherzo depicts their leisure activities.

The BBC Philharmonic under Rumon Gamba have a ball playing this music, no more so than in the dance cues from *On Approval* (1944), the film version of Frederick Lonsdale's stage comedy, where the action was moved back from the 1920s to the 1890s. The film was described by director Lindsay Anderson as 'the funniest light British comedy ever made'. A Waltz, Polka and a Lancers' medley testify to Alwyn's versatility on any cinematic subject. Artwork, picture stills, comprehensive music notes and a fine recording add their own allure to this significant addition to Alwyn's cinematic output. **Adrian Edwards**



Rumon Gamba and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra have a ball playing William Alwyn's film music on their fourth volume for Chandos

## JS Bach

Six Brandenberg Concertos, BWV1046-1051

**Vienna Chamber Orchestra / Josef Mertin**

Supraphon M ② SU4213-2 (108' • AAD)

Recorded 1950



Either Jascha Horenstein (in 1954) or August Wenzinger (1950-53) are commonly cited as leading the first *Brandenburg Concertos* to be recorded at least partially on period instruments. In fact the Czech musical historian and pedagogue Josef Mertin beat them to it in this little-known set which has finally made it to CD.

Though the booklet pays detailed tributes to Mertin, aided by Nikolaus Harnoncourt's widow Alice, the given date is no more specific than 1950, the location a Rococo Viennese hall, Casino Baumgarten, which more recently hosted the premiere of the *Cinderella* opera by the precocious Alma Deutscher. Microphones are placed some way back, you may assume for the sake of discretion in the First *Brandenburg*, which gets off to a rocky start. However, the merits of these remarkable performances gradually reveal themselves.

Those merits centre round the kind of humane, practical musicianship that has more recently distinguished Trevor Pinnock's recordings. Pinnock leads from the keyboard as *primus inter pares*, whereas Mertin stood out in front of a group of mostly students. Among their number were Harnoncourt, Gustav Leonhardt (playing viola da gamba and not harpsichord, which was left to Bruno Seidlhofer) and Eduard Melkus on viola. All three were in their early twenties, marshalled by a steady but not inflexible pulse from Mertin and leader Edith Steinbauer, moonlighting from the first desk of the Vienna Symphony (which Harnoncourt would join two years later).

Using minimal vibrato, full tone and long bows, they contribute to a warmly responsive string body that makes the Third and Sixth concertos especially satisfying. The trumpet solo in the Second is again placed too far back to engage in full dialogue with the recorder, but it's played with admirable polish on what sounds like a valveless instrument by Helmut Wobisch (later chief executive of Vienna's 'other' orchestra) without rivalling the astonishing virtuosity of George Eskdale for Fritz Busch in 1935.

The comparison with Busch is otherwise germane; notwithstanding the scholarly

background, Mertin was also far too good a musician to lapse into the kind of typewriter Bach that a one-dimensional idea of historical rectitude imparted to Baroque music in the middle decades of the last century (not excluding Horenstein). He allows Seidlhofer free rein in the huge cadenza of the Fifth (after an odd hiatus at 3'30" into the first movement) which is duly dispatched with terrific verve. Perhaps too few opportunities are taken for quiet playing in the outer movements, which can sound hard-pressed in terms not of tempos but of dynamic phrasing in a recording that favours the basso end of the continuo. However, the set is essential listening for Bach recording historians. Peter Quantrill

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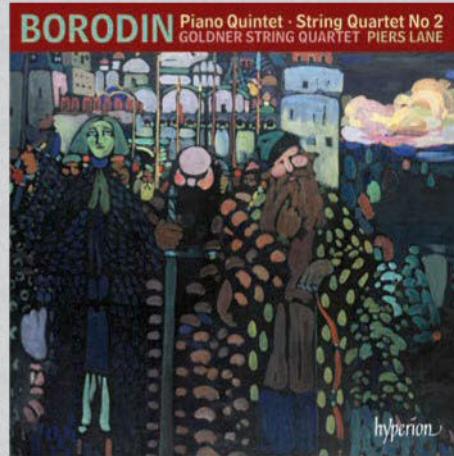
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The young French harpsichordist Jean Rondeau made his debut on Erato in 2015 with 'Imagine', a recital of Bach keyboard sonata transcriptions (3/15). Now, having given us another solo keyboard disc last year of Royer and Rameau (4/16), 'Dynastie' (which is also being released on vinyl) sees him return to Bach for his first recording as a concerto soloist and director, complementing Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard concertos BWV1052 and 1056 with concertos by his sons Johann Christian, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel.

Rondeau has come in for some stick from certain corners of the critical world, facing accusations of bolshy rock'n'roll showmanship, and even of sounding jangly. Also, albeit more kindly put, of sometimes losing momentum through his free, unhurried approach. Listening to 'Dynastie', however, bolshy jangling showmanship is far from the impression I'm left with; and while Rondeau does indeed take a very relaxed approach to pulse and metre at points, the effect comes over more as charming and human, along with carrying a sense of absolute connection and improvisatory ease with his harpsichord akin to that of a jazz pianist (and incidentally jazz piano formed part of his training). Furthermore, moments of metronomic freedom are matched by equal amounts of firm exactitude where the music demands.

BWV1052 in D minor very much sets the tone of the whole: up-tempo but never feeling hurried, a gentle, fluidly flowing touch at the harpsichord, a central movement dramatised by hesitations and pauses, along with a legato approach that unfurls the harpsichord's phrases as if as in one continuous, subtly ornate breath. Then, a strong-toned, crisply rhythmic third movement.

A highlight is Rondeau's own orchestration of the 'Lamento' from WF Bach's Sonata in G major. Sublimely written and glowingly performed, this track is a welcome opportunity for his accompanying string ensemble to move deservedly centre stage, Rondeau complementing them with prominent harpsichord background colour.

As for the rest, JS Bach's BWV1056 in F minor has thoughtfulness, fun and flourish, followed by a reading of CPE Bach's Wq23 Concerto in D minor which captures this stylistic wild child's

maverick choppiness with clipped, buoyant elegance. So, all in all, a recording to savour. **Charlotte Gardner**

## Beach · Chaminade · Howell

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 70'

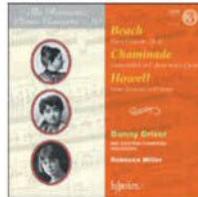
**Beach** Piano Concerto, Op 45 **Chaminade**

Concertstück, Op 40 **Howell** Piano Concerto

**Danny Driver** pf **BBC Scottish Symphony**

Orchestra / **Rebecca Miller**

Hyperion ® CDA68130 (70' • DDD)



None of the 91 composers featured on the previous 69 volumes

in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series has been a woman. As if to redress the balance, Vol 70 has three. It is sponsored by Ambache (a charitable trust dedicated to raising the profile of music by women), and the BBC Scottish SO (leader Laura Samuel) is conducted by Rebecca Miller, whose special rapport with the soloist may or may not have something to do with the fact that she is married to him.

It is little to do with Danny Driver's gender that allows him to far outshine two earlier champions of the Amy Beach Concerto who happen to be women: Marie Louise Boehm (sounding a little elderly now on Vox or as part of the 40-CD Brilliant Classics box set I welcomed in the August 2016 issue) and Joanne Polk (Arabesque, 6/00). This is a big, virtuoso vehicle demanding great endurance and a bravura technique (the first movement lasting nearly 17 minutes is followed by a very difficult *vivace perpetuum mobile* 5'38" in length). Driver surmounts these demands with real artistry and, in the lovely slow movement, immense sensitivity. Hyperion's recording (Simon Eadon and Andrew Keener in Glasgow's City Halls) is also better focused and with greater depth than the otherwise fine version from by Alan Feinberg (Naxos, 6/03).

If Driver offers a robust, muscular view of the Beach, he is certainly in touch with his feminine side in the highly attractive single-movement Concerto (19'33") by Dorothy Howell (1898-1982), composed in 1923. Lighter in substance but even more appealing is Cécile Chaminade's *Concertstück* in the same key as the Beach. The repeated scale figure could become mundane. In Driver's hands it is enchanting – as indeed is this whole disc, a worthy addition to this series, launched more than a quarter of a century ago. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Beethoven · Liszt



**Beethoven** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15<sup>a</sup>

**Liszt** Piano Concerto No 2, S125<sup>b</sup>

**Khatia Buniatishvili** pt

**Israel Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta**

Sony Classical ® DVD 88985 36966-9;

® 88985 36967-9 (57' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

Dolby Atmos-compatible TrueHD 7.1, DD5.1 &

PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Charles Bronfman Auditorium, Tel Aviv, July <sup>b4</sup> & <sup>a6</sup>, 2015



Khatia Buniatishvili, with her trademark slash of red lipstick and tumbling, thick black hair, is among the most charismatic of

present-day women pianists. Watching her play is at least as rewarding as hearing her. Her hair, though it often seems to obscure her vision, has an intense life of its own and is a key element of her stage persona. Her keyboard address veers from imperious to chaste, from mischievous to demonic and from genial to ecstatic. Her awesome technique can lead her astray at times, but in a work like the Liszt A major she thrills and caresses by turns – and sets the spine a-tingling.

In Beethoven's C major Concerto, filmed two days later in the same venue, her visual engagement with Mehta and the players is captivating. Purists will no doubt demur but I found her approach, with its brisk tempos, chamber-music dialogue and her refusal to play the heavyweight classical card, utterly refreshing.

Paradoxically, it is partly the visual element that make these filmed performances frequently frustrating. Buniatishvili is the draw. There is nothing else worth looking at. Certainly not the orchestra, and not Mehta, whose facial expression never changes from impassive. I lost count of the times the director cut away from the soloist at an inappropriate moment, losing the tension, focusing on the wrong section while the piano part was the musical centre of attention.

On my equipment, the film colours are more like a second-generation copy of an analogue video than new, crisp HD digital. The inadequate booklet fails to say anything about the two star musicians or the music they are playing. The sound quality is excellent, although the boast that this is 'the first classical concert on video mixed in the new revolutionary sound technology' – referring to the Dolby Atmos system – will only be relevant to home listeners with Atmos-enabled equipment.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

**Beethoven**

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Simona Šaturová sop Mihoko Fujimura contr

Christian Elsner ten Christian Gerhaher bar

MDR Radio Choir; Leipzig Gewandhaus

Chorus, Children's Chorus and Orchestra /

Herbert Blomstedt

Video director Ute Feudel

Accentus ACC20381; ACC10381

(74' • NTSC • 16.9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 &amp;

PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, December 31, 2015



The Ninth at New Year is a Leipzig tradition instituted in 1918 by its music director, Artur Nikisch. The event may not lend itself to commercial exploitation as readily as the Silvesterkonzerte in Vienna and Berlin but the powerful message of thanksgiving, with which Nikisch wished to mark the end of hostilities, continues to resonate with the concert-goers of a city that has often had little to rejoice about during the intervening century.

This is not a Ninth riven with titanic conflict in the manner of Nikisch's successor as Gewandhauskapellmeister, Wilhelm Furtwängler, but neither is it the kind of middle-of-the-road outline of the symphony to be sat through on an ArtHaus DVD and conducted by the longest-serving holder of the post, Kurt Masur. What may initially strike you as a mode of understatement in the opening two movements, crisply directed, lucidly structured and superbly played as they are, begins to take shape in the slow movement as a long-term vision for the piece: a symphonic celebration for which the finale serves as a necessary culmination rather than a challenge or retort to foregoing conflict. The Gewandhaus players keenly respond to that vision. In his undemonstrative way, Blomstedt has their eyes.

With a small change to the textual underlay and a cadential embellishment, Gerhaher brings a tone of regretful admonishment to his opening solo, like a latter-day Moses returning from Mount Sinai with tablets of stone. As though inspired by their new prophet, the choral basses cry 'Freude' with conviction and a smile. Among the other soloists, Mihoko Fujimura also stands out. I like the way she makes something distinctive of her final leap to the surprising D natural on the cadence of the final quartet. Blomstedt holds a long pause before the inevitable ovation and in that moment, and indeed

illuminating his leadership of the whole symphony as the film direction often lets us see, there is something very like radiance.

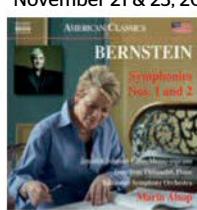
Peter Quantrill

**Bernstein**Symphonies - No 1, 'Jeremiah'<sup>a</sup>;No 2, 'The Age of Anxiety'<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup>Jennifer Johnson Cano mez<sup>b</sup>Jean-Yves Thibaudet pf

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos American Classics 8 559790

(60' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at The Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, Baltimore, <sup>b</sup>September 27 & 28, 2013; <sup>a</sup>November 21 & 23, 2014

A disc of two halves, for sure: a somewhat sober *Jeremiah* and a scintillating *Age of Anxiety*. Perhaps there is simply no reply to Bernstein's feverish intensity in both his recordings of the former; the latter, of course, has the poetic Jean-Yves Thibaudet as protagonist, and he is very much a chip off the Bernstein block. There's a chemistry, too, with Marin Alsop that is tangible throughout.

Both pieces deal with self-doubt – or if you prefer, a crisis of faith – in differing ways, though the First Symphony's self-confidence could hardly have been greater, asserting itself for all to hear just months after Bernstein's unexpected but sensational New York Philharmonic debut in 1943. A double whammy. Its rather filmic immediacy requires a degree of abandon and assurance in the way it is delivered and my impression of this performance with Alsop's Baltimore Symphony is one of too much objectivity – a step back from what was clearly so personal a motivation for Bernstein.

There is nothing wrong with it, per se – it unfolds with direction and dignity. But you notice something withheld at the big climaxes, not least the pulverising pedal note which moves us towards that of the first movement, and even the paganistic scherzo (notwithstanding brave trumpets) tenders a somewhat muted profanity. Jennifer Johnson Cano brings depth of tone and a noble resolve to the concluding Lamentation and just for once Lenny's cathartic pay-off is deafeningly quiet.

Never was our innate solitude as human beings more tellingly invoked than in the two-part clarinet counterpoint that opens the Second Symphony. The inspiration for it was WH Auden's staggeringly virtuosic

poem 'The Age of Anxiety' – a nocturnal odyssey which Bernstein ingeniously chronicles as a dark night of the soul expressed in variation form as 'The Seven Ages'. But the trick of having each variation evolve from some aspect of the preceding one makes not only for a sense of 'destination unknown' but a chain reaction of new beginnings. Thibaudet is our 'everyman', exhibiting great flair and resilience on the journey – with the keenest partners in Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony – and in the extraordinary and quite unexpected 'Masque' where Bernstein takes a cut cabaret song from his first Broadway musical, *On the Town*, and folds it into a jazzy divertissement for piano and percussion. The Frenchman, with great lightness and piquancy, has his fingers skipping across the keys like yet another dance routine for the New York-based show.

But it is in the work's most reflective pages at the start and towards the finish that Thibaudet unlocks the loneliness in us all. Never be deceived by his flamboyance. He is the most soulful of players. His introverted solo just prior to the work's apotheosis is just so beautiful. And, of course, there can be no more vivid manifestation of Bernstein's need for catharsis than the final pages, anticipating as they do Marlon Brando's courageous walk into cinema history at the close of *On the Waterfront*, Bernstein's only movie score.

*The Age of Anxiety* is a cracker of a piece and this excellent performance, splendidly engineered, amplifies that view in every way. Symphonic form, like musical theatre, is always hungry for a new direction.

Edward Seckerson

**Brahms • Glanert**Brahms Clarinet Sonata No 1 (orch Berio)<sup>a</sup>Brahms/Glanert Vier Präludien und Ernste Gesänge, Op 121<sup>b</sup> Glanert Weites Land<sup>b</sup>Michael Nagy bar <sup>a</sup>Kari Kriikku cl

Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / Olari Elts

Ondine ODE1263-2 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Despite Detlev Glanert's self-professed feeling for the melancholia and severity of north German music (he was born in Hamburg), his imposing, sit-up-and-listen orchestral style doesn't, to my ears, have a great deal to do with Brahms's. But that doesn't render Glanert's responses to Brahms's music any less interesting.



Marin Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra give a scintillating account of Bernstein's *The Age of Anxiety*

The composer's arrangement of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* consists of the songs themselves – structurally unchanged but orchestrated – embedded into a continuous orchestral flow encompassing four preludes and an epilogue. Glanert knows his Brahms (note the way he deploys low winds and horns in the songs) but the piece is entirely new given the tendency towards technicoloured angst that comes in the orchestral preludes, each induced by the final bars of the songs that precede them. The effect is akin to that of Brahms's songs bobbing up in a strange dream, where the more troubling, fantastical surrounding elements nevertheless share their DNA.

An advancing of that idea is heard in Glanert's 'vision' of Brahms's Fourth Symphony, *Weites Land*. Here, too, Glanert's knowledge of Brahms (modulation, instrument deployment) is apparent but it comes at a price if you're a fan of Glanert himself. Without much of a residue of its own, this piece needs to be heard as a prelude to the symphony – as commissioned.

But it serves a purpose in this programme, which ends with Luciano Berio's orchestration of Brahms's Clarinet Sonata No 1. As Guy Rickards's note

suggests, Berio believed orchestral clothing transformed the sonata into a concerto. If so, it would be Brahms's weakest by some margin. Sometimes the Brahmsian lilt is inhibited (Berio cramming in too much inner movement); at others it's nailed.

It pains me to moan about such fine musicians but the Helsinki Philharmonic, with their delicate, tight string sound, are never going to conjure up Brahmsian depth; and, for all his dexterity, Kari Kriikku can lack the sense of autumnal glow the music suggests. Ditto Michael Nagy, whose tone and delivery are highly attractive but unerringly narrow. In summary, a frustrated gem. **Andrew Mellor**

### Casella · Donatoni · Ghedini · Malipiero

**Casella** Divertimento per Fulvia, Op 64  
**Donatoni** Musica **Ghedini** Concerto grosso  
**Malipiero** Oriente immaginario  
**Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Damian Iorio**  
 Naxos 8 573748 (64' • DDD)



This is such an attractive programme that it's hard to credit that three of the works

here are receiving their first recording. Damian Iorio and his Swiss orchestra give lively performances of four bright, broadly neoclassical orchestral suites by mid-20th-century Italian composers whom many listeners will know principally by name, if at all.

And hands up: until now I knew Giorgio Ghedini only as Berio's teacher. His Concerto grosso sets the general tone: brisk, zesty music driven by the twin impulses of song and dance, and scored in primary colours. If his ideas aren't all terribly distinctive, there's no problem on that score in the 10 smartly crafted miniature movements of Casella's ballet-derived *Divertimento per Fulvia*. It's the only piece here to have been recorded before but Iorio's account holds up well against Alun Francis on CPO. He maintains an invigorating momentum, and the OSI's wind and brass have confidence by the bucketload.

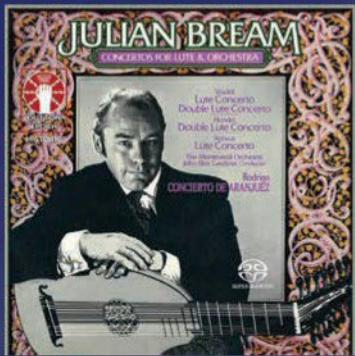
I'd have liked a little more body to the string sound, but that's only really a problem in the mock-exotic doodlings of Malipiero's *Oriente immaginario*, which its composer disowned. In Franco Donatoni's *Musica* it actually helps bring out the vivid wind and percussion



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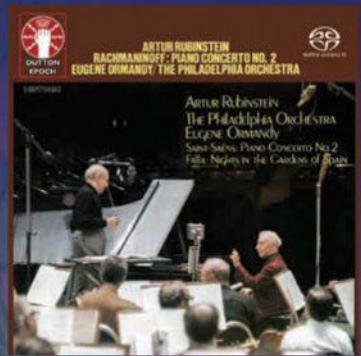


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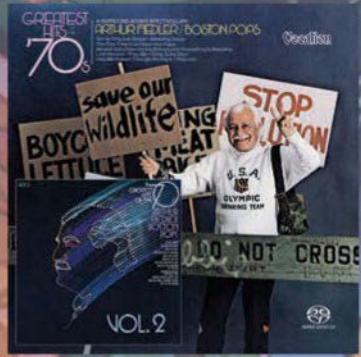
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Miguel Harth-Bedoya leads us to the tender heart of the music of Peruvian composer Celso Garrido-Lecca – see review on page 35

colours of this youthful exercise in 12-note composition – imagine a riper, more sun-kissed Webern. Donatoni apparently described it as ‘my worst piece’, though David Gallagher’s fascinating booklet-notes gamely insist otherwise. Decide for yourself. Iorio and his players find in it the same buoyancy and lyricism as they do in each of the works on this intriguing and entertaining disc.

**Richard Bratby**

*Casella – comparative version:*

*Bolzano-Trento Haydn Orch, Francis*

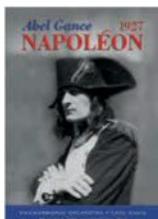
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## Davis

Napoléon

**Philharmonia Orchestra / Carl Davis**

Carl Davis Collection (F) (2) CDC028 (147' • DDD)



It will come as little surprise that Beethoven’s *Eroica*, the symphony he originally dedicated to Napoleon, looms large in Carl Davis’s mammoth score for this silent film classic from 1927. It has been some journey to

have arrived this far, from a previous partial representation of the score on disc with the Wren Orchestra in 2010 to last autumn’s screening at the BFI with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Davis.

The director Abel Gance intended to film Napoleon’s life in full, but having spent the budget for all six episodes on the first, his epic finishes with Napoleon’s entry into Italy, when the screen widens across three panels (a precursor of Cinerama), as the image of an eagle, Gance’s motif for Napoleon’s driving ambition, spreads its wings across all of them. Davis created a new theme for the Eagle as well as a ‘love theme’ for Napoleon and Josephine, but for the most part this is a clever re-employment of contemporary works that include the *Allegro* from Haydn’s *La Passione* Symphony (No 49) with ‘rasping and snarling’ from the brass section added at the request of the producer, Mozart’s early G minor Symphony (K183) to accompany a snowball fight and the opening of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*, which plays during a violent rainstorm at the battle of Toulon. The brooding accompaniment to Josephine’s later imprisonment is the

slow movement of Beethoven’s Op 10 No 3 Piano Sonata and the evil figure of St Just is drawn from Bach’s Passacaglia in C minor, BWV582.

Folk music, opera and ballet from lesser figures such as Grétry, Monsigny and Gossec – his *Tambourin* in a riotous arrangement – are played in scenes away from the battlefield. The most touching sequence comes with the slow variation from the finale of the *Eroica*, which accompanies the preparations for the wedding night of Napoleon and Josephine. Davis’s skill at matching music to cinematic techniques manifests itself in such passages as the rapid cutting montage in ‘Future General’ (disc 1 track 3) and his inspired choice of the 32 Variations for piano – that *Eroica* theme again – to complement the quickly unfolding events in Gance’s narrative in ‘Fragments’ (track 9).

The Philharmonia Orchestra have this music at their fingertips and the recording, a trifle coarse-grained on the ear after those beautifully honed Chandos CD film issues, is adequate. The two discs come in a hardback-style book with a foreword by the film historian Kevin Brownlow and an extensive interview with Carl Davis. **Adrian Edwards**

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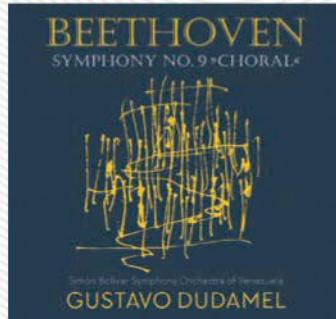
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Recorded in April 2015 in Caracas, Venezuela

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**Joshua Guerrero**, tenor  
**Solomon Howard**, bass





'Elegant, amiable and lucid': Andrew von Oeyen is exemplary in Gershwin, Ravel and Saint-Saëns

## Garrido-Lecca

Danzas populares andinas<sup>a</sup>. Laudes II<sup>a</sup>. Retablos sinfónicos<sup>b</sup>. Suite peruana<sup>a</sup>  
**■ Norwegian Radio Orchestra; ■ Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra / Miguel Harth-Bedoya**  
 Naxos M 8 573759 (54' • DDD)  
 bRecorded live at Bass Performance Hall,  
 Fort Worth, TX, October 29-31, 2010



Add Celso Garrido-Lecca (b1926) to the long list of Latin American composers

whose music deserves our attention. I'd heard his kaleidoscopic Second String Quartet (1988) thanks to a recording by the Cuarteto Latinoamericano (New Albion), which showed the Peruvian composer to be a master of harmonic subtlety and colouristic detail. This Naxos disc presents a fuller portrait, with four orchestral pieces that display the same craftsmanship along with an unabashed melodicism that should have wide appeal.

*Laudes II* (1994) is perhaps closest in style to the quartet. Inspired by an aphorism from Lao-Tzu about the Tao, its musical materials are lean and angular, and its spirit

is largely contemplative. The three movements each unfold rather like free-flowing variations, suggesting a stream-of-consciousness-like flow of ideas.

The disc's three other works are folkloric and reflect Garrido-Lecca's cultural roots. Both the *Danzas populares andinas* ('Andean Folk Dances') and *Retablos sinfónicos* ('Symphonic Tableaux') from the early 1980s wrap folkloric elements in elegant, understated settings. There's something Ravelian about the piquancy of Garrido-Lecca's harmonies and the delicacy of his orchestration. Listen, for instance, to the fourth of the *Danzas*, with its gently aching harmonies, or to the *Daphnis*-like sunrise that's evoked in the third of the *Retablos*. Even when writing for strings alone, as in the delightful *Suite peruana* ('Peruvian Suite') of 1986, the composer provides a wealth of colour while maintaining textural clarity. This suite is gentle, welcoming music, and anyone with a soft spot for, say, Holst's *St Paul's Suite*, should take to it straight away.

Miguel Harth-Bedoya leads us to the tender heart of Garrido-Lecca's music. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra play with greater focus and rhythmic security than the Fort Worth Symphony but all of the performances provide ample pleasure, and

the recorded sound is clear and aptly atmospheric. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Gershwin · Ravel · Saint-Saëns

**Gershwin Second Rhapsody Massenet**  
 Méditation from Thaïs **Ravel Piano Concerto** No 2, Op 22  
**■ Andrew von Oeyen pf**  
**Prague Philharmonia / Emmanuel Villaume**  
 Warner Classics F 9029 59084-8 (66' • DDD)



The American pianist Andrew von Oeyen has been around for some time (b1979, orchestral debut aged 10). He has, I confess, escaped my attention thus far. The booklet essay he provides is as elegant, amiable and lucid as his touch on the keyboard. I very much liked his account of the Saint-Saëns G minor: such attention to detail yet without point-making, like the clearly arpeggiated octave Ds above the stave in the opening flourishes, and the accented staccatos in the left hand shortly after fig E in the Scherzo (2'01" *et seq*), by no means always observed. Despite a few over-projected wind interjections, Villaume

and the Prague players do him proud. In fact this is in every way a fine account, missing only one thing: adrenalin. For that you must turn to Darré, Hough or Grosvenor.

The Ravel falls much into the same category. Everything is there, efficiently and accurately delivered. Among many fine passages, the harp's haunting *quasi cadenza* in the first movement is most atmospherically captured, cor anglais and soloist listen attentively to one another in the last pages of the slow movement (though von Oeyen's final six-bar trill is hardly *piano* or, indeed, sensitive), while the trombone is suitably dirty in the finale. Nevertheless, all this endeavour by no means outshines the likes of Argerich, Michelangeli or (my favourite) Jean Casadesus.

After a thoroughly French concerto and another infused with American elements comes an American piece for piano and orchestra infused with French elements (and, by happy coincidence, the premieres of Gershwin's *Second Rhapsody* and Ravel's G major Concerto took place within 15 days of each other in January 1932). Again, perfectly fine in von Oeyen's hands but not fine enough to displace the more urgent and, ultimately, more idiomatic response of Oscar Levant with Morton Gould. Back to France for von Oeyen's own transcription of the Méditation from *Thaïs*, ending in exemplary fashion this debut recording for Warner Classics.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## Holst • R Strauss

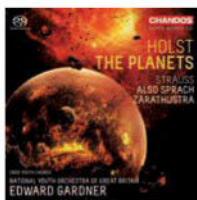
**Holst** The Planets, Op 32<sup>a</sup>

**R Strauss** Also sprach Zarathustra

**•CBSO Youth Chorus; National Youth**

**Orchestra of Great Britain / Edward Gardner**

Chandos (E) CHSA5179 (80' • DDD/DSD)



Edward Gardner directs the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain in a traversal of Holst's *The Planets* that genuinely excites in its combustible power, enormous physical impact and technical accomplishment. Insights are plentiful, not least a cannily paced 'Mars' with some expertly terraced dynamics and where the brutality never lapses into an ugly din. 'Jupiter' is rousing, unstuffy and bright-eyed, with a tremendous burst of energy for the *presto* marking at the close, and it's flanked by a lissom 'Mercury' (how cheekily the NYO's antiphonally placed first and second violins wink at each other

across the sound stage) and an exceptionally perceptive 'Saturn', whose unassailable tread foreshadows Holst's sublime 1927 tone poem *Egdon Heath*. Elsewhere, I love the sweetly expressive string timbre Gardner obtains in 'Venus', and how giddily delirious are the xylophone's madcap antics during 'Uranus'. Production-wise, Chandos can be proud of this SACD: that stunningly well-integrated organ glissando in 'Uranus' is a treat; ditto the choral fade-out at the end of 'Neptune'. In short, this is a *Planets* to relish.

Unfortunately, the performance of *Also sprach Zarathustra* isn't quite on the same level. By chance, just the previous week, I'd dug out Clemens Krauss's vintage 1950 VPO account, which possesses an entrancing elasticity, interpretative nous and poetic sensibility only fitfully glimpsed here, some finely honed playing notwithstanding (dashing work from leader Millie Ashton in 'Das Tanzlied'). The famous introduction generates ample spectacle, and 'Der Genesende' builds to a satisfying peak, but overall Gardner's reading somehow fails to gel and is nowhere near as convincing as those from, say, Reiner (1954), Kempe, Steinberg, Karajan (1973), Haitink or Andris Nelsons's CBSO version for *Orfeo* (recorded in the same venue, Birmingham's Symphony Hall). Don't be put off, though: the disc is worth acquiring for this team's stellar Holst alone. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Jiránek

'Music from Eighteenth Century Prague'

Bassoon Concerto, Jk20. Flute Concerto, Jk11.

Oboe Concertos - Jk15; JK17. Triple Concerto, Jk22. Violin Concerto, JkAp1 (attrib Vivaldi, RVAnh8)

Xenia Löffler ob Sergio Azzolini bn Lenka

Torgersen vn Vojtěch Semerád va d'amore

Collegium Marianum / Jana Semerádová fl

Supraphon (E) SU4208-2 (69' • DDD)



You might have heard of František Jiránek, the Czech violinist and composer who was born in 1698 on a Czech aristocrat's estate, possibly studied with Vivaldi in Venice, then returned to play and compose in Count Morzin's court in Prague. You might even have heard a few of his arresting instrumental concertos and not quite so arresting sinfonias. Beyond that, things start to get woolly. Even his tiny but tenacious coterie of devotees is still struggling to establish the exact authorship of music generally attributed to him.

Such mysteries, though, are key to Supraphon's exploration of 'Music from Eighteenth Century Prague'. This latest release in the series makes a feature of the ambiguities surrounding certain works. Who wrote the Concerto in D for violin: Jiránek or Vivaldi? And can we hold Jiránek personally responsible for the idiosyncrasies of his Concerto in A, not least the unusual viola d'amore part? Or are they the doing of his copyist, the 19th-century d'amore virtuoso Carl Zoeller?

For all the booklet-notes' enthusiastic musings, this disc doesn't provide any answers. But it does familiarise us with music that, on the whole, deserves to be better known. Jiránek, like Vivaldi, has a particular talent for slow movements: so much is achieved with so little, and that's as evident in the haunting *Adagio* of the Flute Concerto in D, with its keening solo melody, as it is in the sighing middle movement of the Triple Concerto in A. Elsewhere there are hits and misses. The oboe concertos sound like Vivaldi on autopilot, lively though they are. But the Bassoon Concerto in G is much more inventive, ingeniously exploiting the instrument's timbre, whether in the lowing *Adagio* or in the genial outer movements. Sergio Azzolini, who has reconstructed the concluding ritornello for this incomplete concerto, is the outstanding soloist, while Collegium Marianum, under their artistic director Jana Semerádová, play with punch and attention to detail. **Hannah Nepil**

## Krommer

Symphonies - No 1, Op 12;

No 2, Op 40; No 3, Op 62

**Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Howard Griffiths**

CPO (E) CPO555 099-2 (77' • DDD)



Like Clementi and Cherubini, Franz Krommer (1759–1831) was a contemporary of Mozart who outlived Beethoven and Schubert. By the time of his death he was already something of an anachronism. Yet during a lifetime spent largely in Vienna, the Bohemian-born Krommer was a prolific and successful composer of chamber music, concertos and at least 10 symphonies, of which eight have survived. In some quarters he was even regarded, optimistically, as a rival to Beethoven.

These days Krommer is known mainly for his mellifluous, stress-free clarinet concertos. But on this evidence his symphonies are well worth an airing,

especially in performances as lively and polished as these. Haydn and Mozart are obvious influences – how could they not be? – in the first three, composed between 1797 and 1807, though in Nos 2 and 3 there are hints of the young Beethoven's more strenuous rhetoric. As with other composers of his generation, Krommer's musical instincts tend to be decorative rather than developmental; and a prime feature of all three works is the inventive writing for woodwind, whether embellishing the themes in the slow movements or adding their cheeky, chuckling commentaries in the *allegros*.

While memorable tunes are at a premium, the music's animation, colour and harmonic deftness offer fair compensation. The scampering outer movements of Nos 1 and 3 conjure the spirit of *opera buffa*, reinforced in the opening Allegro of No 1 by what sounds like a blatant crib from the *Così fan tutte* Overture. After a stalking D minor slow introduction that evokes Mozart's *Prague Symphony*, the *Allegro vivace* of No 2 is the most ruggedly Beethovenian music in all three symphonies, though the abiding impression is of a series of gestures rather than of an inexorable forward drive, à la Beethoven.

Krommer has an engaging line in theme-and-variation slow movements and lusty minuet-scherzos, complete with waltzing trios. The *Adagio* of No 2 – taken very smartly here – sounds like a homage to the *Andante* of Haydn's last completed String Quartet, Op 77 No 2 (I'm not complaining), while the mysterious nocturnal march of No 3 momentarily suggested the *Marche nocturne* in Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ*. This is not, perhaps, music to listen to *la tête dans les mains*. But with zestful, rhythmically alert playing from the Swiss orchestra under Howard Griffiths (the wind taking their opportunities with style and spirit) and an ideally balanced recording, Krommer's genial invention should give pleasure to anyone who enjoys venturing beyond the Classical mainstream.

**Richard Wigmore**

### Lalo • Tchaikovsky

**Lalo Symphonie espagnole, Op 21<sup>a</sup>**

**Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35<sup>b</sup>**

**Augustin Hadelich vn**

**London Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**<sup>b</sup>Vasily Petrenko, <sup>a</sup>Omer Meir Wellber**

**LPO M LPO0094 (68' • DDD)**

**Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,**

**<sup>a</sup>April 17, 2015; <sup>b</sup>February 24, 2016**



Two violin concertos – Tchaikovsky's and Édouard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* – show very different sides of Augustin Hadelich. Recorded in concerts with the London Philharmonic, they demonstrate wide variation in tone and character.

Hadelich's Tchaikovsky is lean, neither as rich or muscular as Vadim Repin, nor as warm as Lisa Batiashvili on her recent DG account. The first movement highlights the lyrical *cantabile* qualities of his playing, with superfine *pianissimos* in what feels a slightly ruminative cadenza, especially when compared with the dramatic impetus in Batiashvili's, although to my ears her pregnant pauses sound mannered on repeated listening. Hadelich's mood is rather introverted, lending a tender fragility to his soliloquies. Speeds are swift, though, which is no great surprise with Vasily Petrenko on the podium, injecting excitement to proceedings where some might feel Daniel Barenboim sucks it away with his exaggerated tempo changes. Petrenko allows no stodge to clog the orchestral arteries and he builds up a

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terrific head of steam in the coda. The Canzonetta is fluid, but Hadelich appears afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve, a feeling confirmed by the finale, which lacks the cossack fire that sets Repin's account aflame.

Where Hadelich's Tchaikovsky is a touch polite, his Lalo (recorded a year earlier) bursts with character. There is plenty of beef here, both in the violin tone and in the LPO's partnering, Omer Meir Wellber drawing out Spanish fire and stamping heels from this colourful – and strangely neglected – score. Hadelich exudes bravado in the terrific Rondo finale, almost a match for Maxim Vengerov or Renaud Capuçon. Applause is retained after the Tchaikovsky, but not the Lalo – which arguably deserves it more. **Mark Pullinger**

*Tchaikovsky – selected comparisons:*

*Repin, Kirôv Orch, Gergiev (5/03) (PHIL) 473 343-2PH  
Batiashvili, Staatskapelle Berlin, Barenboim*

(1/17) (DG) 479 6038GH

*Lalo – selected comparisons:*

*Vengerov, Philharmonia, Pappano (4/03) (WARN) 5575932  
R Capuçon, Orch de Paris, P Järvi  
(3/16) (ERAT) 2564 69827-6*

► See The Musician and the Score on page 44

## Lutosławski · Szymanowski

**Lutosławski Cello Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 4**

**Szymanowski Concert Overture, Op 12**

**<sup>a</sup>Gautier Capuçon VC Polish National Radio**

**Symphony Orchestra / Alexander Liebreich**

**Accentus** (ACC30388 (60' • DDD)



I'm not going to beat around the bush: the reason to hear this recording –

and hear it you should – is Gautier Capuçon's ear-opening performance of Lutosławski's Cello Concerto. This work has fared remarkably well on disc, beginning with Mstislav Rostropovich's pioneering account under the composer's direction on EMI (1974). Rostropovich emphasised the music's stark contrasts, its feeling of titanic, tragic conflict, and his successors have more or less followed suit. Capuçon's interpretation takes a different approach, wresting the solo part's often violent volley of musical ideas into longer, more lyrical lines. The sense of struggle is no less compelling but the result is more elegiac, closer perhaps to an aria than a mad scene. Even in the most ferocious passages of the finale (listen starting around 19'45"), Capuçon manages to bind the disparate phrases together – and note how expressively he renders even the smallest detail, like those sighs and groans at 21'30".

Alexander Liebreich is a sympathetic collaborator, finding moments of surprising beauty in the chaotic tangle of the orchestral part, and elicits warm, superbly articulate playing from the Polish National RSO. The communicative power of the performance is enhanced by Accentus's close, clear recording.

Liebreich takes an even more radical approach in Lutosławski's Fourth Symphony, homogenising the music's textures and rounding its sharp angles. On first listen, I found his reading notably lacking in dramatic impact, particularly in comparison with Edward Gardner's gripping version. But Liebreich's interpretation has grown on me, and while it's certainly not my first choice, I do admire his focus on the symphonic character of this score. Although relatively brief, the Fourth Symphony can feel episodic. Liebreich finds a channel for the music to flow more easily than I believe the composer intended – but who knows?

I have no doubt, however, that Szymanowski's unabashedly Straussian *Concert Overture* requires greater differentiation of character. Liebreich's leisurely tempos are not the issue; Antoni Wit (Naxos) is similarly unhurried, yet his performance is so richly dramatic.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Cello Concerto – selected comparison:*

*Rostropovich, Orch de Paris, Lutosławski*

(2/76<sup>a</sup>) (EMI) 567867-2; (WARN) 2564 60901-9

*Symphony No 4 – selected comparison:*

*BBC SO, Gardner (4/12) (CHAN) CHSA5098*

*Concert Overture – selected comparison:*

*Warsaw PO, Wit (8/09) (NAXO) 8 570722*

## Mozart

**Flute Concerto No 1, K313. Concerto for Flute and Harp, K299<sup>a</sup>. Andante, K315**

**<sup>a</sup>Emmanuel Ceysson** hp

**Paris Chamber Orchestra / Philippe Bernold** fl

**Aparte** (AP115 (56' • DDD)



'Of course Mozart loved the flute!' declares Philippe Bernold in his

booklet-notes, tackling head-on a tired and frustrated Mozart's notorious grumble about being unable to bear the task of writing the works collected here. He needn't have worried. This whole disc comes across as a project born of love; no small achievement in such familiar music.

Bernold directs the orchestra himself, and they respond brightly – the famous Parisian *premier coup d'archet* that Mozart

remarked upon is clearly alive and well. Playing on modern instruments (albeit with valveless horns), rhythms are springy, vibrato is sparingly used and the *tutti*s are deftly and gracefully characterised. Listen to their dandyish strut in the finale of K299 and the dance-like lilt they give to the whole of the *Andante*, K315.

Bernold matches them for charm, and his tone has a beguiling sweetness: velvet over – well, something warmer and more flexible than steel. Silver, perhaps. His partner in K299, the harpist Emmanuel Ceysson, doesn't assert himself quite as vividly as, say, Letizia Belmondo for Claudio Abbado, but the pair do sound like a genuine chamber partnership, with some delightful little moments of fantasy (try the mini-cadenza near the end of the *Andantino*).

The same qualities make for an engagingly intimate K313, with Bernold supplying his own languorous cadenza in the *Adagio*. It's only a pity that the D major Concerto K314 couldn't be included too. There's room for it, and for collectors its absence will count against an otherwise very enjoyable recording. **Richard Bratby**

*Flute & Harp Concerto – selected comparison:*

*Zoon, Belmondo, Orch Mozart, Abbado*

(5/13) (DG) 477 9329GH or 479 3216GB8

## Nixon

**'Complete Orchestral Music, Vol 1'**

**Concert Overture No 3, 'Jacta est alea'.**

**Romance<sup>a</sup>. Palamon and Arcite**

**<sup>a</sup>Ana Török** vn

**Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra / Paul Mann**

**Toccata Classics** (TOCCO372 (71' • DDD)

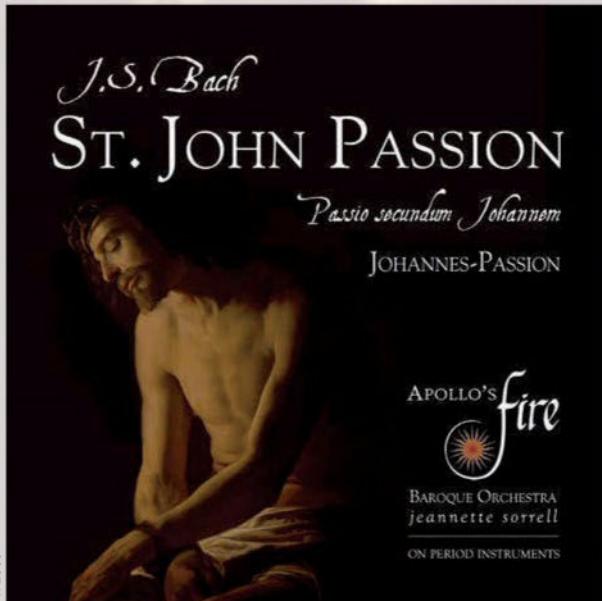


Born in Kennington, south London, Henry Cotter Nixon (1842–1907) studied privately with Henry Smart, Charles Steggall and George Alexander Macfarren. During his twenties he was active as an organist, pianist, orchestral player and conductor, before settling in Hastings, where he established a music college and served for 12 years as chief of the local orchestra (which thrived under his stewardship).

The three works on this bold issue reveal a composer of no great stylistic originality but whose music nonetheless displays a lyrical fecundity, honesty of expression and no mean orchestral expertise that hold the attention – some feat given that the ambitious main offering here, the 1882 symphonic poem in five movements entitled *Palamon and Arcite* (based on John Dryden's eponymous reimagining of 'The



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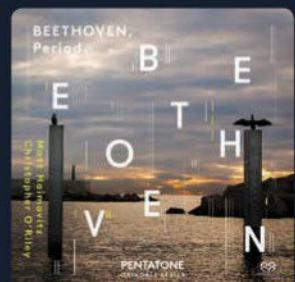
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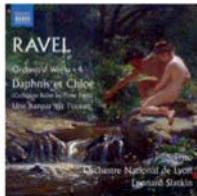
Knight's Tale' from Chaucer), clocks in at just under 48 minutes! According to contemporary reports, it created quite a stir at its October 1888 premiere (the concluding tableau, 'The Tournament', had to be repeated), and would have been heard again before now but for the forced abandonment of a BBC radio recording in 1995. Anyway, it's a most pleasing and diverting discovery, and shares the disc with the last of Nixon's three concert overtures (a thoroughly likeable essay subtitled – we know not why – *Jacta est alea* or 'The die is cast') and an exceedingly pretty, distinctly Mendelssohnian Romance for violin and orchestra dating from around 1889 (Ana Török proves a tasteful soloist).

Suffice to say, Paul Mann directs all this material with watchful sensitivity and secures some commendably tidy playing from the Kodály Philharmonic (which is based in Debrecen, Hungary). The sound, too, is agreeably vivid and transparent to match. Anyone with an ounce of interest in Victorian musical life in Britain will, I fancy, want to check out this enjoyable anthology, the first of three volumes of Nixon's orchestral music that we can expect from Martin Anderson's ever-enterprising Toccata Classics label. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Ravel

'Orchestral Works, Vol 4'

*Daphnis et Chloé*. Une barque sur l'océan  
■ **Spirito; Lyon National Orchestra / Leonard Slatkin**  
Naxos (M) 8 573545 (66' • DDD)



Naxos has done well by Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, with a handful of recordings of his *symphonie chorégraphique* in the company's recent history. Indeed, Leonard Slatkin's is the second in the past decade to feature the Orchestre National de Lyon, the first set down by his predecessor as music director, Jun Märkl, in 2009. This disc marks the fourth volume in Slatkin's Ravel series but I'm not convinced it's preferable to Märkl's earlier effort.

Slatkin's chief problem is a lack of urgency. Even if the premiere was overshadowed by another Sergey Diaghilev commission which opened two days earlier in Paris (the *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, in which Vaslav Nijinsky had caused a scandal as the faun), *Daphnis* is an intensely dramatic work. Slatkin is more content to revel in the languorous stretches of Ravel's meticulous score than to unbutton his shirt in the more hedonistic sections. In the 'Danse guerrière' Slatkin is

too polite – Märkl really tears into this war dance – and the 'Danse générale' finale doesn't climax quite as orgasmically.

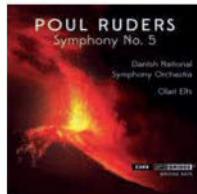
However, in the 'Lever du jour' woodwinds burble and chirrup evocatively and the flute-playing in the 'Pantomime' (possibly the same principal flautist as for Märkl – there is no listing of players in the booklet) is of limpid beauty and poise. The new recording scores in its local choice of chorus, Spirito sounding a good deal more ethereal than an earthbound MDR Leipzig Radio Chorus. No recent recording quite challenges Decca's gorgeous account with the LSO under Pierre Monteux (who conducted the ballet's premiere), which remains one of the most magical in the catalogue.

The recorded sound is admirably detailed and the disc is padded out with Ravel's own shimmering orchestration of *Une barque sur l'océan*. **Mark Pullinger**  
*Daphnis et Chloé* – selected comparisons:  
LSO, Monteux (12/59<sup>8</sup>, 9/96<sup>8</sup>) (DECC) 475 7525DOR  
Orch Nat de Lyon, Märkl (6/09) (NAXO) 8 570992

## Ruders

Symphony No 5

**Danish National Symphony Orchestra / Olari Elts**  
Bridge (F) BRIDGE9475 (27' • DDD)



The premiere recording of Poul Ruders's Fifth Symphony, completed in 2013 and premiered in 2015 by the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Nikolaj Znaider, shows that baby boomers can still rock. The fifth symphonies of Beethoven, Prokofiev, Bruckner and Nielsen are, of course, important works musically and emotionally, and Ruders leaves us in no doubt that his own Fifth is to be taken just as seriously.

It is larger than life, in three intensely self-referential and brilliantly orchestrated movements. In each, Ruders creates vivid soundscapes attuned to his inspirations – medieval to modern, often simultaneously energised by cast-iron church bells, African drums, gorgeous horn solos, erotic flute riffs, breathtaking glissando-ing unison strings and countless other organically ingenious devices, including an occasional undercurrent of Steve Reich. And somehow, after all the noise and beauty, a sense of the natural world emerges which leads at the end to an authentic quiet reverence.

In Ruders's programme notes (available on his publisher's site, along with the meticulously detailed full score, but

unfortunately not in the booklet that accompanies the CD), the composer reluctantly tells a more descriptive 'Ring of Fire' story but truculently compares it to 'the short synopsis found on the backside of a novel'. He needn't have worried.

Add the astounding virtuosity of the orchestra, Olari Elts's inspired conducting and Copenhagen's new Koncerthuset, which *Gramophone* in 2012 called one of the 10 best concert halls in the world, and Ruders's new work is given the best possible start to its recorded life. If the 27-minute playing time doesn't bother you then this is heartily recommended.

**Laurence Vittes**

## A Scarlatti

Six Concertos in Seven Parts. *L'amazzone corsara* - Two Sinfonias. *La caduta de' Decemviri* - Sinfonia. *La donna è ancora fedele* - Sinfonia. *Il prigioniero fortunato* - Sinfonia. *Scipione nelle Spagne* - Sinfonia  
**Concerto de' Cavalieri / Marcello Di Lisa** hpd  
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (F) 88985 37001-2 (53' • DDD)



Alessandro Scarlatti is reputed to have written about 70 operas, so five sinfonias from works written for Naples between 1689 and 1714 are a drop in the ocean – but the music is consistently inventive and played by Concerto de' Cavalieri with brio. The Sinfonia from *Il prigioniero fortunato* (1698) features ripe trumpets in outer movements that flank a little *Adagio* constructed upon a lyrical obbligato cello, and oboes and trumpets cut a fine figure in the bold opening to *Scipione nelle Spagne* (1714). The strings' echo effects in the finale of the Sinfonia from *La caduta de' Decemviri* (1697) are dispatched with swashbuckling swagger, although the outstanding feature is a gorgeous Corellian *Largo*.

Interspersed among the sinfonias are six concerti grossi first published posthumously in London (1740). Their authenticity is debatable; if they were not written by Scarlatti (who had died in 1725), another plausible candidate for at least some of the music is his younger brother Francesco (a violinist who worked at various times in London and Dublin). On the other hand, their style is hardly poles apart from the contrapuntal Sinfonia from *La donna è ancora fedele* (1698). Irrespective of authorship, these seven-part concertos are full of fine things. Concerto de' Cavalieri and harpsichordist Marcello Di

Lisa produce grave solemnity (the F minor opening of No 1), sparkling zest (the quick movements in No 3), fugal severity (the *Allegro ma non troppo* that begins No 4) and an almost ferocious energy (the triple-time dance-like *Allegro* at the heart of No 5), even if courtlier movements (the *Affetuoso* in No 6 and the Minuet in No 2) might have lilted more elegantly.

**David Vickers**

*Concertos – selected comparisons:*

*Europa Galante, Biondi*

(8/02) (VIRG/ERAT) ▶ 545495-2

*Accademia Bizantina, Dantone (ARTS)* 47758-8

## Stucky

American Muse<sup>a</sup>. Concerto for Orchestra [No 1]. Rhapsodies

<sup>a</sup>Sanford Sylvan *bar*

Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound (F) BMOP1050 (57' • DDD • T)



The death last year of Steven Stucky (1949–2016) went largely unremarked amid the relentless, almost daily cavalcade of loss in 2016, but with hindsight his may come to be one of the most keenly felt. The 2005

Pulitzer Prize-winner for his Second Orchestral Concerto, the largest and earliest work here is the First (1987, here unnumbered), a bold, tripartite design. The exploratory central *Adagio* takes half the running time and is framed by two terser, faster spans. Written for the Philadelphia Orchestra, the superb ensemble-writing is interleaved with a wealth of soloistic writing, usually clustered in groups.

The Concerto's musical style is more radical than the couplings, showing the influence of Lutosławski (though, ironically, not the Polish master's own Concerto). In the millennial song-cycle *American Muse* (1999), Stucky's language had opened out and softened a little. The four poems set – by John Berryman, EE Cummings (the brilliant 'Buffalo Bill's'), AR Ammons and Whitman – are melded into a sequence of Britten-like logic and expressive acuity (there are some Brittenish orchestral textures, too). It is a marvellous cycle, sung strongly by Sanford Sylvan, who premiered it.

The most recent work is the opening *Rhapsodies* (2008), a knockout concert-opener written for the New York Philharmonic and Lorin Maazel, and premiered at the 2008 Proms during a European tour. A kaleidoscope of textures

and colours, *Rhapsodies* is brilliantly scored like a miniature concerto for orchestra. The Boston Modern Orchestra Project perform it with élan, as they do all the works here, under Gil Rose's sympathetic direction. Fine sound rounds out a very attractive disc. **Guy Rickards**

## Vasks

Flute Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 3

<sup>a</sup>Dita Krenberga *fl*

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra / Atvars Lakstīgala

Wergo (F) WER7349-2 (74' • DDD)

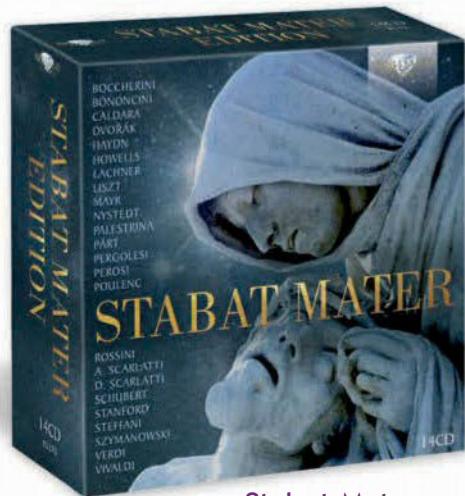


Atvars Lakstīgala and the Liepāja SO follow up their excellent account of Pēteris

Vasks's Second Symphony from 1998–99 (*Odradek*, A/15) with this no less convincing rendering of its successor. Completed in 2005 and commissioned by the Tampere Philharmonic (which went on to record it under John Storgårds), it's an urgently communicative, judiciously scored and readily assimilable statement that plays without a break for just under 40 minutes. In my listening notes I jotted down fleeting stylistic parallels with (among others)

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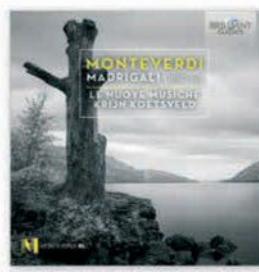
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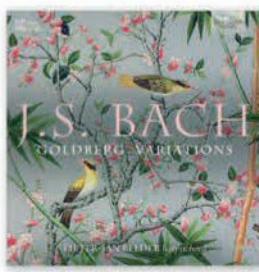
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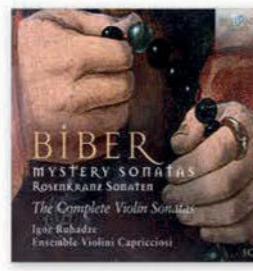
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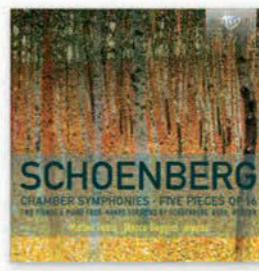
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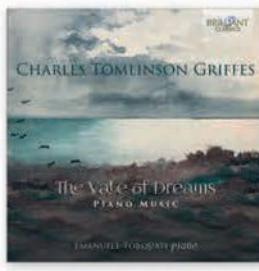
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Shostakovich, Górecki, Pärt, Sibelius, Martinů and Hovhaness. At the same time, I don't want to give the impression that Vasks isn't his own man; indeed, his inspiration exhibits an arresting emotional candour, consolatory beauty, pantheistic wonder and dramatic instinct that will enjoy strong appeal. Lakstigala's lucid conception strikes me as every bit the equal of Storgård's in terms of infectious enthusiasm and unrelenting grip, and he secures some absolutely first-rate orchestral playing, too.

It's preceded here by the Concerto that Vasks wrote for Michael Faust, principal flute of the WDR Symphony Orchestra based in Cologne. Finished in 2008 and revised three years later, it's another spacious, thoroughly approachable creation, whose sizeable middle movement (labelled *Quasi una burlesca*) opens with a jagged motif that also appears in the symphony (listen out, too, for the soloist's ear-pricking vocal contribution during the lengthy cadenza). If I marginally prefer Dita Krenberga's account to the dedicatee's premiere recording with the Sinfonia Finlandia Jyväskylä under Patrick Gallois, it's largely due to the conspicuously fine support offered by Lakstigala and his admirable band, to say nothing of the extra richness, depth and detail afforded by Normunds Slava's expert engineering.

Make no mistake, all admirers of Vasks (who turned 70 last April) should waste no time in hearing this classy Wergo pairing for themselves. **Andrew Achenbach**

*Symphony No 3 – comparative version:*

Tampere PO, Storgård (11/06) (ONDI) ODE1086-5

*Flute Concerto – comparative version:*

Faust, Sinf Finlandia Jyväskylä, Gallois (NAXO) 8 572634

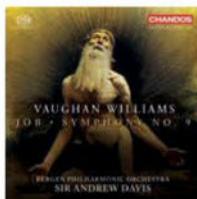
## Vaughn Williams

Job: A Masque for Dancing. Symphony No 9

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra /

Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos (F) CHSA5180 (77' • DDD/DSD)



This generous coupling of two RVW masterworks reprises – and outshines –

Andrew Davis's own Teldec British Line offering from two decades ago with the BBC SO. *Job* receives a performance of striking composure, lustre and palpable dedication. Not only do the Bergen Philharmonic respond with notable poise and eagerness (solo contributions are of the highest quality throughout), Davis conducts with unobtrusive authority as well as a sure hand on the structural tiller, uncovering a

wealth of telling harmonic and textural detail along the way; certainly, in 'Job's Dream' the violas' *non divisi* E natural octave (additionally marked *mf* and *espressivo*) at fig Bb or 1'08" registers to subtle perfection here. Perhaps the last ounce of gleeful malice remains elusive in 'Satan's Dance of Triumph' (where, incidentally, I don't hear the third trombone in the six bars leading up to fig O – try from 0'08" in track 3), whereas the 'Dance of Plague, Pestilence, Famine and Battle' in scene 4 now distils a welcome quotient of frenzy missing from its oddly jaunty London-based predecessor. The spectacularly vivid and wide-ranging Chandos engineering handles everything with aplomb, not least that hair-raising organ- and timpani-writing in scene 6 (the best I've heard since Handley's 1983 LPO version).

There's heaps to praise, too, in Davis's scrupulously observant and nobly unforced conception of the Ninth Symphony – and, once again, what admirably vital and shapely playing he draws from the Bergen orchestra (bouquets to the highly characterful trio of saxophones and Martin Winter's gorgeously mellow-toned flugelhorn). The dusky second movement is especially evocative of the Wessex landscape in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (which provided the symphony's initial spark), its glorious second subject wonderfully affecting in its full-throated ardour (and deeply touching on its wraith-like return in the coda). Come the visionary finale, clear-sighted rigour goes hand in hand with a questing spirit to cap a mightily impressive Ninth that, to my mind, deserves a place at the top table alongside the 1969 Boult, Handley and Haitink. **Andrew Achenbach**

*Job – selected comparisons:*

LPO, Handley (3/93) (CFP) CD-CFP4603

BBC SO, A Davis (7/97) (WARN) 2564 69848-3;

(APEX) 0927 44394-2

*Symphony No 9 – selected comparisons:*

RLPO, Handley (1/95) (CFP/WARN) D 575312-2

LPO, Boult (1/01) (EMI/WARN) 903567-2

LPO, Haitink (11/04) (WARN) 984759-2

## Vivaldi

The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Concerto,

RV156. Sinfonia 'al Santo Sepolcro', RV169

Concerto Köln / Shunske Sato vn

Berlin Classics (F) 0300829BC; (F) 0300830BC

(51' • DDD)



I'm constantly amazed at how the fount of fresh spins on *The Four Seasons* never

appears to dry up, and this latest contribution from Concerto Köln is no exception. Their own particular modus operandi has been not to 'emulate historical performance practice down to the last detail, but rather to emphasise the freedoms that are embedded in the score'; and while perhaps this doesn't sound like the most revolutionary of Op 8 mission statements – and indeed the first thing to hit your ears is still simply the crisp, sprightly sort of reading you'd expect from any top period band – their deviations from the norm do pack a substantial punch.

This is even true when the deviation is actually a move towards greater subtlety, such as in Spring's third movement where, instead of the usual hard lean on the first and sixth beats of the bar, Concerto Köln apply only the gentlest pressure. This small action, or lack of action, has the surprisingly profound effect of producing far longer, more flowing musical lines of thought than we're used to hearing here.

The soloist's line is where many of the more obviously daring freedoms are to be found. Take Autumn's opening *Allegro* where, as the imagined wine takes effect, Sato's violin gradually slips, slides, scratches and misses more of its intonational targets, although all with such deft airiness that it tickles rather than jars.

Less convincing in my book is the ensemble's theory that Vivaldi intended the slow movements as they appear on the page to be merely melodic skeletons, or starting points, to be rhapsodised upon *ad libitum* by the soloist. With Spring this makes at least for an interestingly novel musical ride. However, with Winter, whose original melody has been all but completely masked, this approach only serves to illustrate the extent to which the movement's mood of purity and calm absolutely hangs on its very melodic simplicity.

Even so, this is a classy offering, particularly when you also factor in recording engineer Jurgen Reis's 'Against Loudness Mania' approach to mixing and mastering: real spatial representation of the sound sources, no compressors, only minimal spot microphones with very low levels, all resulting in a natural yet vibrantly bristling sound quality entirely free from extraneous performer sound effects. And no one can argue with that. **Charlotte Gardner**



Gustavo Dudamel takes the reins in the Vienna Philharmonic's traditional New Year's Day concert, delighting in 'the purely orchestral qualities of the music'

## 'New Year's Concert 2017'

**Lehár** Wiener Frauen - Nechledil March  
**Nicolai** Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor -  
**Mondaufgang E Strauss** Mit Vergnügen, Op 228  
**J Strauss I** Indianer Galopp, Op 111. Radetzky  
 March, Op 228 **J Strauss II** Auf der schönen  
 blauen Donau, Op 314. Auf zum Tanzen!, Op 436.  
 Die Extravaganten, Op 205. Mephistos  
 Höllenrufe, Op 101. Eine Nacht in Venedig -  
 So ängstlich sind wir nicht!, Op 413.  
 Pepita-Polka, Op 138. Rotunde-Quadrille,  
 Op 360. 's gibt nur a Kaiserstadt, 's gibt  
 nur a Wien, Op 291. Tausend und eine Nacht,  
 Op 346. Tik-Tak Polka, Op 365  
**Josef Strauss** Die Nasswalderin, Op 267.  
 Winterlust, Op 121 **Suppé** Pique Dame -  
 Overture **Waldteufel** Les patineurs, Op 183  
**Ziehrer** Der Schätzmeister - Hereinspaziert!,  
 Op 518  
**Vienna Singverein; Vienna Philharmonic  
 Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel**  
 Sony Classical M ② 88985 37615-2 (103' • DDD)  
 Recorded live at the Vienna Musikverein,  
 January 1, 2017



Sentiment against  
 the young Venezuelan  
 conductor Gustavo  
 Dudamel often turns

ugly, with his most fierce critics lapsing into a disreputable strain of essentialism: that he is somehow an outsider and parvenu, and thus incapable of making music at the level of a Karajan or Kleiber. Both those names were invoked by commenters on web pages discussing his appearance as conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic for the 2017 New Year's Day Concert. How dare he presume to take the baton for this most cherished annual tradition?

Dudamel, 35, is now the youngest conductor to lead the holiday concert, which began in 1941. Along with the usual staples, *The Blue Danube* and the *Radetzky March*, Dudamel brought eight works new to the event, including Suppé's *Pique Dame* Overture. When American public television broadcast the concert (complete with young dancers waltzing in elegant palaces and footage of the Lipizzaner Stallions), the Suppé overture was the first piece on the programme; the Sony recording places it seventh. That's unfortunate, because not only is it a surprisingly substantial and delightful piece, but its performance best encapsulates Dudamel's approach to the music.

More than anything else, one senses a slightly buttoned-up, almost reverential respect for these scores, and a delight in the

purely orchestral qualities of the music. The *Pique Dame* Overture is at first atmospheric and suggestive, before it shows its true dancehall colours. In this, and in the beloved *Blue Danube*, Dudamel is strongest in the scene-setting and colouristic details. The waltzes and polkas burble along nicely but mostly under their own steam, with some of them, including Johann Strauss II's *There's only one Imperial City...*, becoming, if not quite mechanical, perhaps a bit bland. But when the music evokes the countryside, or birdcall, or winter landscapes, then Dudamel digs in and finds delicious colours and subtleties.

At the end of Josef Strauss's *The Girl from Nasswald*, Dudamel also blows a bird whistle. One wouldn't know that, simply listening to the recording, or indeed the more important fact that he conducts this music from memory. The visuals suggest that Dudamel enjoyed himself, and that the orchestra members were engaged and happy to be working under him. They also confirm what the ear eventually concludes: that he is both genial and dutiful, and if this isn't the most rollicking or wry view of the Strauss clan and their contemporaries, it is never less than entertaining and exquisitely polished. **Philip Kennicott**

# Lalo's Symphonie espagnole

Violinist **Augustin Hadelich** discusses this often-maligned work with Caroline Gill

Perhaps it's surprising that a piece like Edouard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* – considered by many a lightweight work – can result in discussions so involved that by the time you look up from the table, it's covered in empty dishes and cups of cold tea. Augustin Hadelich, the German-born, Grammy Award-winning violinist, has just finished recording the piece for the London Philharmonic Orchestra's own label and when we meet in London on a rare day off, it's clear from the start that he is as generous with his time as he is considered in his opinions. Although a significant chunk of our interview may have been spent talking about food (he grew up on a farm in Tuscany), by the time the cups and dishes are cleared, three hours have passed.

The *Symphonie espagnole* may be Lalo's best-known work – not only his most minutely crafted, but also his own favourite – but it still struggles for recognition as a piece worthy of the same respect as the concertos of his contemporaries Brahms, Bruch and Tchaikovsky. It probably suffers from being written within a very short time of Bizet's hugely popular *Carmen* (as tempting as it is to suggest that one may have been influenced by the other, there is nothing to indicate that Lalo was writing for any reasons other than to honour the fashion

*'It's more of a violin concerto than, say, the Brahms where there is so much going on in the orchestral score'* – Augustin Hadelich

for Spanish music that was prevailing at the time, to give his friend Pablo de Sarasate something to do). But there is nothing in Lalo's work that should stop it from holding its head as high as *Carmen*'s. The Spanish identity of the music would not have felt like a cliché to Lalo or the work's dedicatee, and the result is a piece of remarkable elegance and charm that will only descend into saccharine nostalgia if played with that intention.

Hadelich is aware of the work's potential for sentimentality, but is clear on how to avoid that pitfall. At the same time, he appreciates the ingenious and intricate compositional processes behind the work. 'I think it's more of a violin concerto than, say, the Brahms,' he says. 'Here, the violin is usually front and centre, and you can see that that is Lalo's



Augustin Hadelich: the violinist believes *Symphonie espagnole* is as valid as *Carmen*

intention, just through the dynamics on the page. The dynamics for orchestra when the violin is playing are generally *pp*, unlike in, say, the Brahms, where there is so much going on in the orchestral score that the violinist had to follow. Sarasate didn't like that.'

I wonder in that case how much Lalo might have consulted Sarasate on the technical demands of the piece, and if Hadelich can hear the guiding advice of a practical violinist in any of the particularly tricky passagework. 'Well, all the hard, fast passages lie pretty well,' he says. 'So half the time all the arpeggiated stuff that sounds ridiculously difficult really only has two or three shifts. That's not to say it's easy – it's not – but those passages are written *for the violin*.' To find an example, we go straight for a passage in the Intermezzo where a chromatic flourish up to a very cursory E minor starts a long and frantic passage of semiquaver triplets. The music cycles through almost as many keys as there are bars before landing



## The historical view

### *Edouard Lalo*

*Letter to the composer Otto Goldschmidt, 1878*

'I stuck with the title despite all the objections, first of all because it reflected what I was thinking of...but also because it had none of the banality of others that were suggested. The outcry and criticism has passed or soon will.'

### *Tchaikovsky*

*Letter to Nadezhda von Meck, 1878*

'Do you know the *Symphonie espagnole* by the French composer Lalo? The work has given me the greatest pleasure. It is so delightfully fresh and light. Like Delibes and Bizet, the composer cares more for musical beauty than for the old traditions.'

### *Paul H Lang*

*Music in Western Civilization (1941)*

'Saint-Saëns's clever music lacks conviction and ardour and today is faded. Lalo's strong sense for coloristic orchestration and harmonisation was decisive in turning the younger generation in this direction.'

heavily back at a repeat of the colourful Spanish melody that began the movement. It's a surprisingly complex passage – certainly not musical flotsam just there to link two sections – that is an example of how Lalo will suddenly start to modulate to unusual places after a relatively long period of harmonic stasis, creating surprises that help the piece to sparkle with an air of playfulness. For Hadelich, always being aware of the direction of the harmony is of fundamental importance; he tells me that the underlying sense of harmonic tension and release is largely how he maps out his own understanding of the work's phrasing. It is also how he drafts the ebb and flow of changing tempos and contrasting rhythms, which is a constant feature of all the movements of the *Symphonie espagnole*.

*'It feels good to play fast at the beginning, but once you get to the semiquavers you have to slow down or you really can't hear the notes – it's just a blur'*

'All of this is remarkably difficult to get together with orchestras', he says, 'because you've always got to make the slower bars more sentimental in the same way that if you were a singer you would take time to sing it out very expressively before the rhythm starts again – that habanera – and then goes back.' Hadelich continues: 'So it goes fast, slow, fast, which is hard because it's not supposed to feel like a mechanical change, but rather just walking out of one tempo and into another. You need a good conductor to do it, otherwise you're stuck just following and it can become very boring, actually, very quickly.'

Is there a trick to finding the right tempos in this work, I wonder. 'There's always more than one way to play something,' he admits. 'There are pieces where at a certain point it's okay just to switch tempo: you can have a situation where there is no tempo that suits all the passages. But the trick with performing the Lalo is that there is a certain tempo at which you want to play the theme. It feels pretty good to be really fast at the beginning, but once you get to the semiquavers you have to slow down or you really can't hear the notes – it's just a blur.'

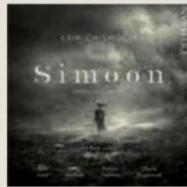
It must take a lot of discipline, I suggest, to anticipate just how fast you will be willing to take those passages. You need to be sure to set up the tempo accurately at the beginning without losing the sense of joy necessary for the opening theme – even though that may give it a deceptively slow speed – in order to pre-empt the later, faster sections. I imagine it isn't easy, and it is a further illustration of the hidden depths of the work. But as much as it is important to discuss the piece's substance – and to identify and defend its strengths, of which there are many – it is still undeniable that there are passages that are hard not to read as clichéd. There are *glissandi* written into the score, for instance, that make it next to impossible not to play the music in a way that could almost make it its own worst enemy, even to those determined to hear it as a piece of serious art music. Hadelich gives a belly laugh at this idea, saying that those melodies are like 'low-hanging fruit' – just too tempting to leave. 'I think if you try to be too straight, you miss the point!' 

► To read Gramophone's review of Hadelich's new Lalo recording, turn to page 37

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CD34139

#### Erik Chisholm: *Simoon*

Jane Irwin, Philip Sheffield, Damian Thantrey, Charlie Drummond, Music Co-OPERAte Scotland / Ian Ryan

The *Simoon* – the violent, hot wind that blows in the Arabian and North African deserts – gives its name to August Strindberg's psychological drama, published in 1889. Third in a triptych of operas which Chisholm wrote after his move to South Africa in the late 1940s, his adaptation of Strindberg's play evokes the desert setting through a blend of the Hindustani scales he had studied in wartime India and a skilful use of free twelve-tone technique, but was never performed with orchestra in his own lifetime. Restored here to full colour, this terrifyingly compact fifty-minute work reveals Chisholm's ability to create music whose extraordinary sensuality feeds upon death, with a subject matter as thoroughly topical in its own time as it is resonant today – turning as it does on a confrontation between faiths and on the consequences of colonial aggression. This brave work gives powerful expression to powerful emotions and beliefs; it is an undoubtedly twentieth-century masterpiece.

'rich and potently atmospheric tone-painting ... taut, simmering angularity as well as glittering refinement'  
— Gramophone, January 2017



CD34179 (2 discs)

#### The Cellist of Sarajevo: chamber music by David Wilde

Red Note Ensemble

David Wilde – extraordinary pianist and musician, pupil of Franz Reizenstein and Nadia Boulanger – is the veteran of nine Delphian piano recordings, documenting his remarkable Indian summer as a performer. Now, the label turns to his compositional output: cellist Robert Irvine and his colleagues in Red Note Ensemble survey the works that emerged from Wilde's 'Bosnian' period, when he travelled to besieged Sarajevo to help preserve the city's cultural life, earning him the friendship of colleagues including the heroic members of the Sarajevo String Quartet.

'powerful, interesting and extraordinary music, beautifully written ... Beautifully organised as well as deeply felt'  
— BBC Radio 3 Record Review, November 2016



CD34175

#### Buxton Orr: Songs

Nicky Spence, Iain Burnside, Jordan Black, Nikita Naumov, Edinburgh Quartet

When Nicky Spence was first shown the score to 'The Boy in the Train', the last of Buxton Orr's Songs of a Childhood, he was transported to the late 1980s – his own childhood in Scotland. 'Something about Buxton's sense of humour, excitement and honesty resonated with me,' Spence says, 'and fed my desire to discover more about his work. On contacting his widow, I was led to a treasure trove of unrecorded works for voice.' Sometimes thrillingly complex and always beautiful, and given character and verve by Orr's delightful setting of the Scots language, this rich output has finally found a worthy modern-day advocate.

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# Chamber



Richard Bratby enjoys Dohnányi's Serenade for string trio:

*'I don't think any composer since the 18th century did fast, humorous finales more entertainingly'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



David Threasher listens to Mozart's Flute Quartets:

*'There's plenty of fun to be had with this charming music, as Lisa Friend and her colleagues demonstrate'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**

## Beethoven

'The Complete String Quartets, Vol 3'

String Quartets - No 3, Op 18 No 3;  
No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95; No 13, Op 130

**Elias Quartet**

Wigmore Hall Live ® ② WHLIVE0086 (96' • DDD)  
Recorded live, October 9, 2014



In case you cast an eye across the movement contents of Op 130 and feel short-changed

because Beethoven's rewritten finale is included rather than the original *Grosse fuge*, fear not: Volume 1 in the series (reviewed by Peter Quantrill, 4/15) includes an alternative performance (February 20, 2014) where that massive, gnarled denouement rounds things off 'by giving each gesture the rhetorical space of a Bruckner finale', as PQ appropriately puts it. The rounding off in this instance is almost as effective, tiny changes in pulse and dynamic, not to mention bringing to the fore significant inner voices, lending that closing *Allegro* a trenchant, animated feel that does indeed suggest a true finale. Fail in that respect and you're left with a journey without destination; at least that's how I hear it.

Right from its *Adagio* opening, the first movement urges forwards, with firm *sforzandos*, then at 2'47" Marie Bitlloch's *sotto voce* cello leads to Sara Bitlloch's lead-violin-playing of the second subject, lifted on the shoulders of a marked *portamento*, with quiet, finely tensed *ben marcato* figures thereafter. The lead-in to the (essential) repeat is malleable, the trance-like development (from 9'23") pulsing away gently, with meaningful embellishments intensifying the mood. This is characterful, well-paced playing, the Trio to the *Presto* second movement gutsy and rasping; and note how beautiful the preparatory phrases for the *Andante* sound, leaning dolefully before the cello takes the music into a more playful place. The Cavatina attempts to express the inexpressible, most famously at the point when the first violin is marked

*beklemmt* – oppressed, anguished, like a stifled sob (from 5'12") – here so fragile and delicate, Sara Bitlloch's playing somewhat reminiscent of Adolf Busch.

As to the D major, Op 18 No 3, Bitlloch leads yearningly into the opening two bars, almost as if the music starts *andante* (which it doesn't), though once into the *Allegro* there's plenty of light and shade to arrest one's attention. This is another fine performance, very key-conscious. So too is Op 95, even within the first minute or so, with numerous varieties of attack and dynamic, while the startled third movement is very much a deer caught in the headlights, and the finale, again thoughtfully prepared, dances away with just a hint of desperation about it.

These are in many respects remarkable performances but how do they stack up against the competition? The Belcea Quartet (Zig-Zag Territoires, 1/13, 8/13) match the Elias for intelligence but are less conspicuous on the *portamento* front, in case that concerns you, while the Takács (Decca, my favoured option all-round) falls somewhere between the two. But what's for sure is that all three ensembles convey the essence of these timeless masterpieces.

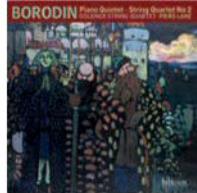
**Rob Cowan**

## Borodin

String Quartet No 2<sup>a</sup>. Piano Quintet<sup>b</sup>.

Cello Sonata<sup>c</sup>

© Julian Smiles vc bc Piers Lane pf ab Goldner Quartet  
Hyperion ® CDA68166 (78' • DDD)



The comparative novelties here are Borodin's Piano Quintet in C minor and his Cello Sonata in B minor – comparative, that is, in relation to the Second String Quartet, widely popular and widely recorded. However, neither the Quintet nor the Sonata is by any means unknown on disc. The Quintet featured compellingly on 'Martha Argerich and Friends: Live from the Lugano Festival

2014' with Alexander Mogilevsky as pianist (Warner, 8/15); the Cello Sonata was included alongside works by Rachmaninov and Shostakovich on a terrific 2011 disc from Alexander Chaushian and Yevgeny Sudbin (BIS, 8/11).

In fact, this new CD of the Piano Quintet, Cello Sonata and Second Quartet from the Goldner Quartet and Piers Lane replicates exactly the programme of a 2011 Pražák Quartet release with Michal Kaňka as soloist in the Cello Sonata and Jaromír Klepáč as pianist, well reviewed in *Gramophone* at the time (Praga Digitals, 9/11). However, newcomers intrigued by Borodin's forays into chamber music will derive considerable satisfaction from the way that the Goldners and Piers Lane pinpoint the characteristics of the Quintet, an early, pre-First Symphony work but one that, for all its occasional nods to Mendelssohn, has the distinct imprint of folk-tinged melody that was to be one of Borodin's mainstays.

The Cello Sonata, which has survived only in an incomplete set of parts and is known today in the reconstructed version by Mikhail Goldstein, again shows the direction in which Borodin's melodic thinking was going: in the central movement particularly Julian Smiles and Piers Lane capture its warm romantic glow. That applies, too, to the Nocturne of the Second Quartet, a work of maturity and one that the Goldners interpret with a winning lyrical touch, well-projected energy and an instinctive feel for the musical language. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Brahms

String Sextets - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36

**Cypress Quartet** with

**Barry Schiffman** va **Zuill Bailey** vc

Avie ® AV2294 (77' • DDD)



This disc, like the Cypress Quartet's previous releases on Avie, was recorded at



Violinist Simon Smith, viola player Paul Silverthorne and cellist Katherine Jenkinson (back to camera) rehearsing Dohnányi's Serenade, Op 10

Skywalker Sound in California – although these were made ‘in front of a live studio audience’. What impact, if any, the presence of an audience had on the quality and character of the performances is impossible to determine. Yet even if there’s no applause, coughing or other extraneous noise, there is a significant sonic difference in comparison with, say, the Cypress’s Beethoven cycle. Here, we seem to be placed extremely close to the ensemble in a smaller, acoustically drier space. Every musical strand is clear and present but so, too, is every defect in intonation.

Such flaws are easily forgivable; the musically wondrous 1952 account by Casals et al (Sony Classical) is rife with such imperfections. What’s troubling about this new recording is that there are few if any moments of sufficiently hushed or even truly soft playing. The overly close perspective doesn’t help, but ultimately it’s the performers who are responsible as they overlook many of Brahms’s instructions – some subtle, some not. The opening of Op 18’s Scherzo, for example, is to be played *mezzo-forte* at first, but when the theme returns (at 0’33”) it’s marked *f* (*forte*, momentarily, then immediately *piano*). The Cypress and their guests make no distinction. Or, in the first movement

of Op 36, Brahms carefully variegates the dynamics, yet the entire passage is played at more or less a steady *mezzo-forte* (listen from 12’00”).

None of this would matter as much if the interpretations conveyed a more enveloping sense of joy and warmth. Too often, though, the music seems to progress doggedly, beat by beat rather than in long phrases. And while there are some lovely moments – including an effectively deliberate yet deeply felt reading of Op 36’s slow movement – they simply don’t add up to a satisfying whole. The Leipzig Quartet (MDG), Kammermusiker Zürich (Jecklin) and Bartók Quartet (Hungaroton) are my current recommendations in modern sound.

I’m disappointed, as the Cypress’s Beethoven cycle was impressive, and saddened, as this is their final release. The quartet disbanded several months after this recording was made. They’ll be missed.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Dohnányi · Kodály

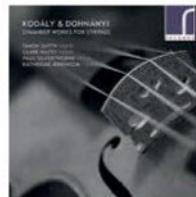
Dohnányi Serenade, Op 10<sup>a</sup>

Kodály Duo, Op 7<sup>b</sup>, Serenade, Op 12<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>bc Simon Smith, <sup>c</sup>Clare Hayes vn <sup>a</sup>c Paul

Silverthorne va <sup>ab</sup>b Katherine Jenkinson vc

Resonus (RES10181 (70' • DDD)



I’ll just say it: I don’t think any composer since the 18th century did fast, humorous finales more entertainingly than Ernő Dohnányi. Think of the Suite in F sharp, the *Symphonic Minutes*, the Sextet, Op 37, and the little zinger of a rondo that closes his Serenade, Op 10 – as if Dohnányi invited the spirits of Haydn and Brahms to a Budapest coffee shop and got them tipsy on pálinka. It’s a delicious finish to the brisk, zesty performance of the Serenade that ends this disc of Hungarian chamber music from four London-based string players.

They don’t appear to be a regular ensemble, and in fact it’s not entirely clear which of the two violinists involved is playing in what. Simon Smith heads the list, so presumably he’s playing first violin in the performance of Kodály’s Serenade for two violins and viola. The viola player is Paul Silverthorne, and he provides a satisfactorily sonorous bass – as well as taking an eloquent lead in the central ‘night music’ *Lento*. It’s easy to hear why this piece was so extravagantly praised by Bartók.



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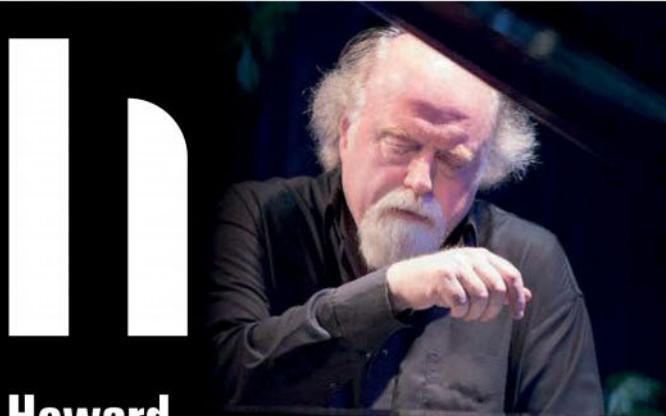
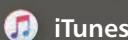


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Pianist Wu Han and friends give strong performances of piano quintets by Dohnányi and Taneyev

Presumably Smith is also the violinist in Kodály's mighty Duo, Op 7, of 1914. It's a work with a formidable recorded history, and this performance never quite sheds a slight feeling of instability, acquired in its opening bars. The contrast in tone between the gleaming violin and the mellow, warm-grained sound of Katherine Jenkinson's cello is striking: the difference between ink and pastels. It's very different from the full-beam intensity of, say, János Starker and Josef Gingold's famous account, but not without its own quiet beauties – even if some of the *portamentos* sound a little cosmetic. This is goulash from the tourist menu, rather than straight from the cauldron and scalding your mouth. But it still tastes good.

**Richard Bratby**

Kodály Duo, Op 7 – selected comparison:  
Starker, Gingold (1/89) (DELO) DE1015

## Dohnányi · Taneyev

‘Wu Han Live II from Music@Menlo’

Dohnányi Piano Quintet No 1, Op 1<sup>a</sup>

Taneyev Piano Quintet, Op 30<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Nicolas Dautricourt, <sup>b</sup>Sean Lee,

<sup>a</sup>Alexander Sitkovetsky, <sup>b</sup>Arnaud Sussmann vns

Paul Neubauer va David Finckel vc

Wu Han pf

ArtistLed © 653738 289621 (71' • DDD)  
Recorded live at The Center for Performing Arts  
at Menlo-Atherton, CA, August 5, 2014 and  
August 2 & 3, 2015



‘His own compositions are more remarkable for sound workmanship and a cultured taste than for charm or warmth of inspiration’, says the second edition of *Grove* about Sergey Taneyev. They can't have heard his tremendous Piano Quintet of 1911 – one of the supreme masterpieces of Russian Romantic chamber music and so filled with passionate emotion that it feels at times like it's about to metamorphose into Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* symphony. (It's not much shorter, either.)

It needs a virtuoso performance, and along with Dohnanyi's Quintet, Op 1, that's what it gets here, recorded live at the Music@Menlo festival in California, and featuring the festival's co-founders, the pianist Wu Han and the cellist David Finckel. If it wasn't for the immediacy of the performances, though, you

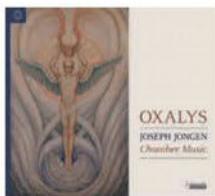
wouldn't guess: the balance between piano and strings is clear and realistic with plenty of clarity to the piano's left hand and a minimum of congestion in the more turbulent climaxes. It's a more pleasant sound than on Supraphon's recent version with the Martinů Quartet (5/15).

As for the performances, I initially found the phrasing in both works a little strait-laced. In fact, over the full length of the Taneyev, that rhythmic clarity actually helps articulate the musical argument. There's no shortage of colour or of ardour: whether it's Paul Neubauer's viola cutting through the storm like a trumpet or Han's steel-toothed staccato hinting at Shostakovich in Taneyev's third-movement passacaglia. Dohnányi's Brahmsian musical bustle also benefits from these players' clarity and sense of direction. The lopsided mazurka-rhythms of the finale have an enjoyable swagger.

In short, then, strong performances of two very rewarding pieces. Just ignore the artwork, which implies that this is a star vehicle for Wu Han: a disservice to her role in some highly impressive ensemble-playing. **Richard Bratby**

## Jongen

Concert à cinq, Op 71. Danse lente,  
Op 56bis. Deux Pièces en trio, Op 80.  
Rhapsodie, Op 70  
**Oxalys**  
Passacaille (PAS1022 (61' • DDD))



A misty incantation, a swirl of sound with a whole-tone flavour: if it comes as a surprise to discover Joseph Jongen – creator of that fabulous *Symphonie concertante* for organ and orchestra – as a chamber composer, the French accent with which these beguiling works speak comes as no surprise at all. Jongen, a friend of Fauré, wasn't the first or last Belgian composer to look to Paris. In the four pieces recorded here, each dating from around the early 1920s, he finds his own balance between Impressionist sensuality and neoclassical freshness.

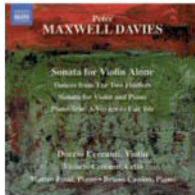
And if you've ever wished that Ravel had written more pieces in the vein of his *Introduction et Allegro*, you'll probably warm to the most substantial works here: the *Rhapsodie* for piano and winds and its successor, the *Concert à cinq* for flute, harp and string trio. The Brussels-based chamber group Oxalys certainly make a persuasive case; enthusiastically playing out, catching the swing of Jongen's waltz and habanera rhythms, and pushing the music forwards brightly and expressively.

The recorded sound has enough bloom to create an atmosphere – perhaps a little congested in the louder *tutti* passages but generally vivid, and catching the full flavour of some distinctively Gallic woodwind tone. There's some nicely sculpted quiet playing in the *Danse lente* and *Deux Pièces en trio* (the latter recorded over a decade ago, but not so you'd notice), but in the main this is spirited, open-hearted music. Jongen thinks on a big scale and these outsize, wide-eyed performances certainly don't sell him short.

Richard Bratby

## Maxwell Davies

Sonata for Violin Alone. Dances from The Two Fiddlers<sup>a</sup>. Piano Trio, 'A Voyage to Fair Isle'<sup>b</sup>. Violin Sonata<sup>c</sup>  
**Duccio Ceccanti vn** <sup>b</sup>**Vittorio Ceccanti vc**  
**Bruno Canino, ab** <sup>a</sup>**Matteo Fossi pf**  
Naxos (M) 8 573599 (63' • DDD)  
<sup>c</sup>Recorded live at the Teatro Goldoni, Florence, May 29, 2009



Maxwell Davies's output for strings is remembered chiefly for his 10 'Naxos'

String Quartets. However, the cycle represents only the tip of the iceberg, and a glimpse into the rich diversity belonging to his music in this medium can be gleaned from this recording.

The title of the opening work is significant: *Sonata for Violin Alone* (rather than the more prosaic 'Sonata for Solo Violin') was one of Maxwell Davies's final works, and the composer may well have known it would be. Performed by the excellent Duccio Ceccanti (to whom it is dedicated), every gesture in this bleak work is carved out of loneliness, isolation and an almost deep-seated fear. Defiant outbursts rupture the work's elegiac qualities during the middle section, perhaps acting as a rallying cry against the inexorable fading of the mortal light, but one is left at the end with stark, skeletal lines and hollowed-out emptiness.

A sprightly set of dances arranged by Maxwell Davies from his children's opera *The Two Fiddlers* (1978) could not be further removed from the bleak tone of *Sonata for Violin Alone*. Ceccanti's rather literal performance of these tunes would have benefited further from the kind of subtle give and take of line and tempo that characterises the Scottish folk fiddle tradition. He embraces this style more effectively in the folk-imbued solo violin cadenza that appears halfway through the piano trio *A Voyage to Fair Isle* (2002), although his performance is more than matched by Lucy Gould's brilliant rendition (and Alice Neary's equally impressive cello solo that follows) on the Gould Piano Trio recording (Champs Hill, 5/15). Like the later Violin Sonata (2008), the trio pits moments of lyrical reflection against dense dissonances and sharp lines. It's a delicate balance that works better when shaped into a dialogue between violin and cello, with piano acting as an effective dramatic counterweight between the two.

Pwyll ap Siôn

## Mozart

Flute Quartets – K285; K285a;  
K491h17/285b; K298. Andante, K315  
(arr Mordechai Rechtman)  
**Lisa Friend** / members of the **Brodsky Quartet**  
Chandos (P) CHAN10932 (59' • DDD)



Mozart is widely held to have detested the flute, despite the fact that he wrote a whole opera about one and the instrument is such an integral colouring agent in nearly all his late music. More likely his antipathy was towards a flautist – one Ferdinand Dejean of Mannheim, an amateur player who commissioned a series of flute quartets from the 21-year-old composer and received two (K285 and 285a), while Mozart's letters to his father back home in Salzburg dissemble about his progress on the works and the amount of money he received.

The other two quartets are now believed to date from around a decade later and to have no connection with the Mannheim quartets or Dejean. K298 contains quotations from popular Viennese songs of the mid-1780s, and K285b could be a compilation from Mozartian fragments with an arrangement (described by annotator Neal Zaslaw as 'functional but not particularly imaginative') of the variations from the *Gran Partita*, K361.

There's plenty of fun to be had with this charming, undemanding music, as Lisa Friend and her Brodsky colleagues demonstrate. Perhaps, though, there's more to be mined from them: Emmanuel Pahud deploys a wider dynamic range in his standard-setting 1999 recording, which is set in a more generous acoustic and calls on the talents of three star string players. Pahud's articulation is also more acute, making his performances sound that touch more spruce than Friend and friends'. The older disc is currently only available to download, however, so the Chandos recording could be a useful stand-in in the meantime. David Threasher

Flute Quartets – selected comparison:  
Pahud et al (11/99) (EMI/WARN) D 556829-2

## Paganini

Caprices for Solo Violin, Op 1 (with piano accompaniment by Schumann)  
**Maristella Patuzzi vn** **Mario Patuzzi pf**  
Dynamic (P) CDS7774 (79' • DDD)



Interestingly, the first time Paganini's 24 Caprices were recorded in any form was in 1940 with Ferdinand David's piano accompaniments (published five years after Schumann's in 1860), played by the



Flautist Lisa Friend (right) with producer Rachel Smith, recording Mozart Flute Quartets for Chandos

20-year-old Ossy Renardy and Walter Robert, and still the only recording of this version. So far as I know, this is only the fifth time that Schumann's piano accompaniments have been recorded, the last of his works that have survived from his time in the asylum at Endenich in 1855, preserved by Clara but not published until 1941.

I have not heard Tossy Spivakovsky and Lester Taylor (Omega Classica, 1966) but there is little to choose between this new version (albeit with its muddy piano sound) and two made in the 1990s: David Garrett and Bruno Canino (DG, 8/97) and Ingolf Turban with Giovanni Bria (Claves, 1994). Maristella Patuzzi produces a lovely, airy tone in the middle register (I particularly liked Nos 11, 18 and 21) but where speed and articulation are paramount, none of these compare with the consistently successful Benjamin Schmid and Lisa Smirnova (MDG, 1995), who also benefit from an ideal recorded balance between the two instruments.

The Patuzzis' Caprice No 1, for instance, clocks in at 2'01", Schmid and Smirnova in an exhilarating 1'43". Likewise the central section of No 13 and the *presto perpetuum mobile* of No 16 in G minor (with the added

advantage of Smirnova's lighter touch). No 4, the longest of the Caprices by some way (6'41" from the Patuzzis), has passages of chalky scraping and dodgy intonation. In No 9, one of the six favoured by Liszt for transformation into a piano solo, Paganini specifically marks the opening phrase *sulla tastiera imitando il flauto (e piano)*, followed by *imitando il corno (e forte)*; Maristella Patuzzi offers little dynamic or tonal contrast. So a noteworthy disc but one that is ultimately outshone by the competition.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

### Prokofiev · Rachmaninov · Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Cello Sonata, Op 119 Rachmaninov Cello Sonata, Op 19 Tchaikovsky Méditation, Op 72 No 5. Romance, Op 51 No 5  
**Nina Kotova vc Fabio Bidini pf**  
 Warner Classics © 9029 59246-0 (68' • DDD)

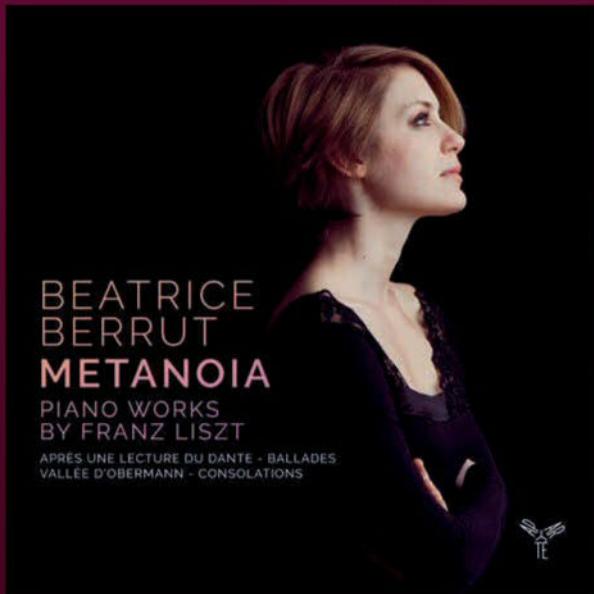


No sooner had I commented on the unusual Prokofiev/Rachmaninov coupling in my Moser/Korobeinikov review (in the February issue) than this one arrived from

Nina Kotova and Fabio Bidini. They place Rachmaninov first and from the off this is a reading with a clear sense of direction, well paced and technically adroit. What it doesn't have is the personality of the best, be they Alisa Weilerstein (Decca, 11/15) or Steven Isserlis. Take the very opening of the sonata: Kotova plays with sensitivity, but Weilerstein seems to be moulding the music from the very air itself. Or the scherzo second movement, which in Isserlis's hands has the perfect balance of skittishness and, when the big tune arrives, heartbreaking yearning, Hough the ideal partner here. By comparison Kotova and Bidini are just a little plain. And the latter makes notably heavier weather of the finale's piano part than Hough.

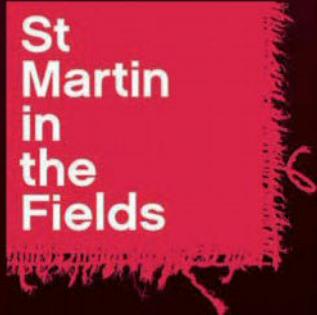
Kotova nails the tuning in the opening to the Prokofiev, however (a concern with the otherwise fine Moser reading). But again, though the playing is assured, it isn't all that characterful. There's far less sense of the different sound worlds of Rachmaninov and Prokofiev than there is in Moser/Korobeinikov – just sample the way Kotova presents the theme that emerges from the pizzicato in the first movement, which is given more edginess by Moser. In the second movement,

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The Alma Quartet's set of complete Schulhoff string quartets shoots straight to the top - review on page 54

Korobeinkov sets off with a subversive glint in his eye, a mood gleefully taken up by Moser, whereas Bidini and Kotova are altogether more elegant. In the finale, Kotova is, like Daniel Müller-Schott (*Orfeo*), relatively steady, tempo-wise, but the latter reveals a whole world of colour. By way of filler we get two borrowings from Tchaikovsky's piano music; the Op 51 Romance is merely pretty, while the ravishing *Méditation* from Op 72 is no more than conventionally rapturous. **Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparison:*

Moser, Korobeinkov (2/17) (PENT) PTC5186 594

*Rachmaninov – selected comparison:*

Iserlis, Hough (7/03) (HYPE) CDA67376

## Reger

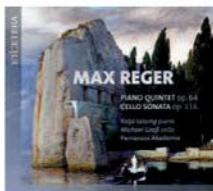
Cello Sonata No 4, Op 116<sup>a</sup>.

Piano Quintet No 2, Op 64<sup>b</sup>

**a**Michael Gross vc **a**Kolja Lessing pf

**b**Parnassus Akademie

Etcetera F KTC1562 (67' • DDD)



'Believe me, my Quintet Op 64 will make the rounds!' declared Max Reger.

Oh dear. As Parnassus Akademie's pianist Kolja Lessing explains in his thoughtful booklet-notes, this big, Brahmsian thundercloud of a piece received only one performance in Reger's lifetime, and recordings haven't exactly been thick on the ground since. In the wake of his centenary year, though, perhaps the time is finally ripe for Reger's very personal combination of muscular intellect and deeply Romantic spirit.

Parnassus Akademie's approach is certainly Romantic. The sensuous way the four string players phrase together in the opening bars, their *portamentos* and their rich tone, quickly cancel any lingering prejudices about Reger the bespectacled dry-as-dust. I particularly liked the way the group manage to clarify the final unwinding of Reger's counterpoint at the same time as creating a real sunset glow in the quintet's closing bars. The balance of piano and strings is realistically captured, and Lessing is especially eloquent in the quieter passages – when casting a sort of magic sleep spell over the end of the second movement, for example.

Lessing steps out of the ensemble with cellist Michael Gross in Reger's Fourth Cello Sonata: a polished account which

might have benefited from a little more thematic characterisation (and urgency) in the outer movements. Gross's sound is sweet but on the bland side, and with several recordings of this work available, I'd be inclined to try Alban Gerhardt and Markus Becker first (Hyperion, 4/08). But the Quintet is the big story here, and that can be unhesitatingly recommended.

**Richard Bratby**

## Schnittke · Elschenbroich

**Elschenbroich** Shards of Alfred Schnittke

**Schnittke** Cello Sonata No 1. Madrigal:

In memoriam Oleg Kogan. Musica nostalgica. Suite in the Old Style

**Leonard Elschenbroich** vc **Petr Limonov** pf

Onyx F ONYX4180 (60' • DDD)



Leonard Elschenbroich continues his exploration of less ubiquitous Soviet fare with this fine album dedicated to a creative voice he describes as picking up where Shostakovich left off. Schnittke's cinematic, German-Russian-Jewish

polystylistism can be droll, caustic or calamitous, with the ‘meaning’ of his scores more than usually dependent on the sensibility and conviction of the executant.

The easiest music here is the *Suite in the Old Style*, a byproduct of collaborations with film director Elem Klimov on the comedy drama *Adventures of a Dentist* and the spoof documentary *Sport, Sport, Sport*. An apparently innocent collage of genre pieces, it was originally conceived (like the infinitely darker, sparer, unaccompanied *Madrigal in memoriam Oleg Kagan*) with violin rather than cello taking the lead. Stylistically the scores would appear to have little in common. Both are played straight.

The biggest piece is the First Cello Sonata, presented in 1978 to Natalia Gutman and once reckoned the most frequently performed and recorded of all Schnittke’s works. Typically it does not offer resolution, running down from the archetypal building blocks of its opening *Largo* towards an unsettling, washed-out kind of neutrality. Set against Raphael Wallfisch and John York, Elschenbroich and Petr Limonov plot a daringly extreme course, their first movement more tautly conceived, the central scherzo a positive whirlwind. The finale goes to the other extreme, its disconsolate recall of past gestures spun out to epic proportions. Alban Gerhardt and Steven Osborne on Hyperion are less easily outshone but this massive ‘Russian’ approach suits the music.

Whatever you make of the *Shards of Alfred Schnittke*, conceived by Elschenbroich himself as ‘a sort of composed interpretation’ marking the 10th anniversary of the master’s death, his playing is both forceful and refined, the sound beautifully focused. His written note is helpful too. Here is one cellist with a horror of cluttering up the world with unnecessary re-recordings of the music everyone knows. Should you be anxious about following him into pastures new, try sampling the title-track, *Musica nostalgica*, a minuet filched from the earlier *Suite* which indulges fond memories of Bach, Haydn and Schubert before tipping us gently into Schnittke’s hallucinatory world of idiomatic dislocation. As the soloist explains, ‘nostalgia’ in the Russian sense of the word implies a painful emotion, to be ‘regarded with respectful fear’. Strongly recommended.

**David Gutman**

*Selected comparisons:*

Wallfisch, York (A/02) (BBOX) BBM1032

Gerhardt, Osborne (HYPE) CDA67534

## Schulhoff

Complete String Quartets

**Alma Quartet**

Gutman (F) ② CDNR161 (110' • DDD)



This is the first comprehensive set of the music for string quartet by a composer whose notated yet completely silent anti-war statement *In futurum* (not part of this particular venture) anticipated John Cage’s 4'33" by more than 30 years. It’s an extraordinary traversal, beautiful, witty, unsettling and, as so often with Erwin Schulhoff, redolent of the Roaring Twenties, soon to roar out of control into one of the darkest periods in modern history, the composer himself being one of its tragic victims. The Alma Quartet is made up of players from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, so one can expect, as a matter of course, a keen sense of musical interrelation.

The numbered quartets are perhaps the most accomplished works here, the First (1924) opening with a ferocious *Presto con fuoco* reminiscent of Hindemith at his most uncompromisingly precocious, then a wryly lilting *Allegretto*, an *Allegro giocoso* that toys with Bartókian dance rhythms and employs whistling harmonics, and the mysterious finale, nearly seven minutes of melancholy or agitated musing that’s not too far removed from the darker music in Prokofiev’s two quartets, the Second especially. Schulhoff’s own Second Quartet (1925) takes sustenance from the world of Smetana (the Piano Trio and *The Bartered Bride*), or seems to, whereas halfway through the Theme-and-variations second movement we’re thrown into a mirror-image Twenties dance music.

The Five Pieces date from 1923 and do the rounds of Vienna, Italy, the Czech Republic and Argentina, with music to match, the warmly seductive *Alla tango milonga* fourth movement being the most original. Bonus tracks feature three more miniatures, including a couple of military march ‘sketches’. But perhaps the most unexpected work is also the most expansive, the String Quartet ‘No 0’ in G, Op 25, Schulhoff’s first work to be published after the First World War and which runs the gamut, in stylistic terms, from Mozart through to Mahler, the latter most obviously in the *Langsam* second movement, which both recalls the finale of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony and anticipates the film music of Alfred Newman and Max Steiner.

The set closes with a seven-minute *Divertimento*, lighter fare than the other works in the set, it’s true, but highly enjoyable, the second movement *Cavatine* (with fleetingly coincidental premonitions of Walton’s *Henry V* film score, ie ‘Touch her soft lips and part’) showing the Alma Quartet capable of the most seductive playing. I expect much from them in the future, maybe Hindemith, Korngold, Walton, Prokofiev, even a Bartók cycle. As to rivals in this particular repertoire, the Aviv Quartet (Naxos) are very good in the first two quartets, and the Schulhoff Quartet in the First Quartet and Five Pieces (VMS), but I reckon that as an overall first recommendation for Schulhoff quartets this set shoots straight to the top. Excellent notes by Yoel Greenberg.

**Rob Cowan**

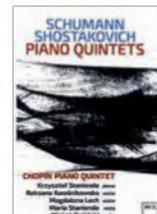
## Schumann • Shostakovich

**Schumann Piano Quintet, Op 44**

**Shostakovich Piano Quintet, Op 57**

**Chopin Piano Quintet**

Dux (F) DVD DVDDUX8239 (63' • DDD)



There is much to enjoy on this DVD. Individually the young Polish musicians are all accomplished and conscientious, and their ensemble has evidently been well coached. In many ways the results are more polished than they might be from a pick-up group of bigger-name artists, while the filming is unfussy in its camera angles and the players themselves have no distracting visual quirks.

Even so, I have to ask why we need the DVD at all. Certainly it is a fine promotional tool – the performances are as good as, though not better than, many in the catalogue. But the visuals only serve to highlight that the playing is not yet fully developed in terms of characterisation. As they are here arranged on the platform, there is little chance of eye contact between the pianist and the string quartet, and in any case all five are playing into their music (or, in the case of the pianist, into the keyboard) rather than for each other, which more or less rules out musical drama or spontaneity.

Shapely though the first movement of the Schumann undoubtedly is, it suffers, as it so often does, from so much rhapsodising in the lyrical second theme that the first constantly has to play catch-up. For the slow movement the multi-tempo approach is again quite a widely



Pianist Nathan Williamson accompanies Fenella Humphreys in rare English violin music, both players 'well attuned to the styles and expressive purposes of each work'

favoured option, but it is without sanction from the score and soon becomes predictable. The Scherzo is wonderfully dexterous, but at the same time less joyful than it can be, while the finale is once again tastefully textured but lacking élan.

The Shostakovich opens with a rather mannered piano solo, which ends on a split note that should have been retaken (there are couple more such in the Scherzo). The whole first movement lacks drive, and the rest, though less reproachable in terms of tempo and often quite sensitive, could be more subtly characterised. The break between the fourth and fifth movements is a major miscalculation.

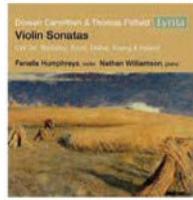
Recording quality is excellent and the accompanying essay respectable (though it gets off to a shaky start by claiming that 'the piano quintet appeared in the European music at the end of the 17th century').

**David Fanning**

### 'Violin Sonatas'

**L Berkeley** Elegy & Toccata, Op 33 Nos 2 & 3  
**Carwithen** Violin Sonata **Delius** Légende  
**Ireland** Berceuse. Bagatelle **CW Orr** Minuet.

Serenade **Pitfield** Violin Sonata No 1  
**C Scott** Two Sonnets **P Young** Passacaglia  
**Fenella Humphreys vn** **Nathan Williamson pf**  
 Lyrita © SRCD359 (76' • DDD)



What might seem at first glance a bit of a hotchpotch of a disc, on closer acquaintance listens like a charming, delightfully varied chamber recital of English rarities. If there are no unalloyed masterpieces, there is no trivia either. The Sonatas by Carwithen (c1951) and Pitfield (1939) are the major items: it is a measure of Pitfield's obscurity that this is one of his most often played works. Both are concisely constructed, appealing works, Pitfield's seeming more a Sonatina than Carwithen's until the final 'Cyclic Variations' elevate it to a higher plane. There is something similar about Delius's early *Légende* (1895, arranged with piano accompaniment c1915), the final, spectral coda of which puts the work on a completely different footing. By comparison, Cyril Scott's beautiful *Sonnets* (1913) and the pairs of pieces by

Berkeley, Ireland and Orr may seem trifling, but there is considerable artistry in their construction, and depth of feeling as well. So, too, with the brief but compelling *Passacaglia* (1931) by Percy Young, best known as a musicologist and editor of Elgar's incomplete *The Spanish Lady*.

This is a nicely produced disc, the repertoire beautifully played by Fenella Humphreys, more than ably accompanied by Nathan Williamson. Both players sound well attuned to the styles and expressive purposes of each work, whether the formal abstraction of Carwithen and Young or the undeclared programmes behind Delius or Scott. Beautifully clear sound, too. The one fly in the ointment is the sloppiness in documentation regarding dates of composition: those of the Carwithen, Berkeley, Scott and Delius pieces and Ireland's *Berceuse* given on the back cover are contradicted in John Turner's booklet text. I'd go with Turner for accuracy.

**Guy Rickards**

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# André Previn

David Gutman pays tribute to the German-born American polymath whose career has embraced the lowbrow, the highbrow and everything in between

**N**onchalant collegiality has cloaked André Previn's incredible breadth of talent. 'Pierre Monteux used to say to me that it is very simple, in a position of authority, to make an orchestra play,' said Previn, recalling his mentor's advice, 'but much harder to make them want to play. I have never forgotten that.' Still, the case for the prosecution is easily made. Previn as cultural communicator has been no revolutionary. Nor was he a podium wizard like Carlos Kleiber, his own, inelegant stick technique applied to an infinitely wider if essentially peripheral repertoire.

Or so it was said. He was a dazzlingly quick learner whose musical approach – never histrionic, aware (surely) that what is left unsaid often touches us the most – could be traduced as glossy or half-hearted. Rejecting specialisation *can* mean spreading oneself too thin, though few now question the acclaim accorded to Leonard Bernstein. Snubbing both modernism and period practice proved unfashionable too. And for this self-deprecating showman, prolonging a silence at the end of a work or milking applause has always been anathema.

Previn's British celebrity derives partly from his years as a primetime TV personality. *André Previn's Music Night* and his other undemanding BBC programme strands look positively Reithian alongside today's reality TV. The conductor and his beloved LSO famously secured their place in light entertainment history on the *Morecambe and Wise Show* in 1971; and in the 1972 Christmas special he appeared appropriately attired as a 'conductor' on a Routemaster bus. We no longer have bus conductors – but whatever happened to family-friendly terrestrial TV coverage of Western art music?

Despite diminished mobility and occasional grouchiness, Previn has kept going. What may prove his final LSO appearance in June 2015 included an imperfect account of Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, music

he made a repertoire staple. He began, though, with a gag: laboriously installed on the rostrum in his special chair, the frail veteran swivelled round, announcing succinctly, 'He's up!'

With a legacy so diverse, even the most ardent fan is unlikely to encounter more than a taster. A nimble classical pianist with a pearly, slightly shallow tone once associated with the West Coast jazz scene, Previn retained his facility into old age. His film music career is usually discussed in terms of Oscar-winning musicals, though his admiration for

Britten and Walton (later reciprocated) is more obvious in original scores for serious dramas like *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955) and *Elmer Gantry* (1960). Later, the

Tom Stoppard collaboration *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (RCA, 7/78), a 'play for actors and orchestra' first performed in 1977, called for pastiche Shostakovich. Previn's soft-focus eclecticism is best transmuted in the set-piece arias of the opera *A Streetcar Named Desire* (DG, 4/99).

'Classical' conducting was the core activity for half a century. Less familiar scores were easily read, and late Romantics and conservative moderns suited best of all. As with Eugene Ormandy, his commercial background made him a superb accompanist. Recording partners have included Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dame Janet Baker, Barbara Bonney, Kyung Wha Chung, Jean-Philippe Collard, Renée Fleming, Radu Lupu, Itzhak Perlman, Gil Shaham and Anne-Sophie Mutter, who was briefly his (fifth) wife. Many of their collaborations remain on recommended lists.

Revisit Previn's early studio groundbreakers and they're seldom quite as you remember. The LSO Shostakovich Fifth (RCA, 5/66) is uncomplicated, yet the slow movement strikes astonishingly deep – where did that spaciousness come from? The rhythmic vitality coursing through Walton's First (RCA, 1/67) may be rooted in jazz, though let's

## *Although sometimes a certain throwaway casualness can frustrate, there remain many unimpeachable classics*

### DEFINING MOMENTS

#### • 1929 – Born Andreas Ludwig Priwin, Berlin, April 6

The year is disputed but the trajectory clear, taking in Berlin's Hochschule für Musik and an escape from the Nazis via Paris to Los Angeles. American citizenship followed in 1943.

#### • 1949 – First original film score for MGM

*The Sun Comes Up* was released this year, starring Jeanette MacDonald and canine superstar Lassie. It was army service in 1951 which facilitated studies with Monteux.

#### • 1963 – Classical conducting career begins

First 'proper' date, with the Saint Louis Symphony. Later, having started making LP recordings in the UK, he held the post of music director at the Houston Symphony for two seasons from 1967.

#### • 1968 – Appointment as LSO principal conductor

Not without controversy, Previn's tenure lasted until 1979, transforming the ensemble's public profile; landmarks included the Salzburg Festival debut of 1973. A looser association resumed in the 1990s.

#### • 1996 – Becomes an honorary Knight Commander

*of the Order of the British Empire (KBE)*  
Gramophone's own Life Achievement Award followed in 2008.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES

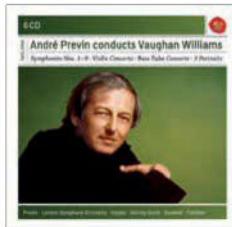
not ignore the contribution of the self-consciously brilliant, (then) all-male ensemble that would shortly offer him the top job. I was lucky to hear this celebrated realisation live at an impressionable age! Elsewhere a certain throwaway casualness can frustrate. Previn's Korngold Symphony (DG, 8/97) has not only unequalled gravitas but also uncorrected glitches. Still, there are unimpeachable classics, like the second of his three recordings of Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2 (HMV, 4/73). Plentiful outings merit similar acclaim, from Françaix's *L'horloge de flore* (RCA, 11/67) to Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (RPO, 1/87). While touring his humane and joyful *Turangalîla-symphonie* (HMV, 6/78), Previn faced walkouts from conservative audiences new to Messiaen. He introduced Shostakovich's Thirteenth

to London in 1971 and gave the Eighth a sensational Austrian premiere in 1973. Another important crusade was on behalf of Shapero and his *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* (New World, 3/96). He gave the unheralded British premiere of John Harbison's Third Symphony as recently as 2012.

Completed in the early 1970s, Previn's instantly iconic

Vaughan Williams cycle features a wonderful, boisterous *London Symphony* (RCA, 8/72) and a *Pastoral Symphony* (9/72) so refined it's as if Monteux himself were at the helm. In the Fifth, Previn would later elide all four movements as if in a single breath. He was always moved to tears by the Passacaglia's miraculous final bars. Does that make his conception sentimental? I don't think so. **G**

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



**Vaughan Williams**  
Symphony No 5  
LSO /  
André Previn  
RCA (3/72)

# Instrumental



Marc Rochester immerses himself in Reger's complete organ music:

'A revelatory release, establishing Reger not just as a prolific composer but as an entertaining one too' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



Jed Distler listens to Garrick Ohlsson's Scriabin sonatas:

'Ohlsson's measured pacing uncovers intricate inner melodies and rarely perceived polyphonic interplay' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**

## Ambrosini

'Guitar Songbook'

Arie e danze. Canzone a perdere. Canzone d'ombre. Canzone molle. Ciaccona in labirinto (called Ciaccona del giglio). I'mbrazilian. Notturno con sogno. Notturno (Tombeau per Jimi H). Nulla nox sine linea. Priapo assiderato. Rap. Song of Innocence, Song of Experience. Tantalo sorridente. Three Holograms. Tre Studi 'en plein air'. Tre Studi sulla prospettiva - No 2, Canzona curva, detta 'dell'occhionlino'

Alberto Mesirca gtr

Kairos © 0015012KAI (75' • DDD)



Is it going too far to say that Claudio Ambrosini has written, in his 1975 work for

solo guitar *Notturno* (*Tombeau per Jimi H*), an elegy rivalling Manuel de Falla's *Homenaje pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy*? Not really; for in deploying a combination of techniques associated with blues and rock as well as classical styles – string bends, slides, harmonics, slurs and so forth – with the same heightened spatial, timbral and colouristic sensibilities exhibited in all the remarkable works on this superb recording, Ambrosini evokes a wistful lugubriousness that is as personal as it is intensely intimate.

Alberto Mesirca's fluent, committed interpretations find a similar mood presiding over certain passages in Ambrosini's other, more delicately rendered nocturnes, such as the *Notturno con sogno*. Nevertheless, he equally relishes the more florid and almost violent musical gestures that characterise much of Ambrosini's work. Take the opening percussive *Arie e danze*, the hectic *Rap* or the agitated *Priapo assiderato*, exploding with string slaps and crazed trills before drifting off in a dreamy glissando. Then there are the jazzy *I'mbrazilian*, the Impressionistic chiaroscuro of *Canzone d'ombre*, the Janus-like *Ciaccona in labirinto* (called *Ciaccona del giglio*) and the witty 'Arcimboldo docet' (*Three Holograms*),

in which the player coughs, sighs and kisses in duet with the guitar.

Ambrosini draws on a diverse range of styles but he does so to forge a unique language, which, in the context of the classical guitar at least, is more introverted than projecting outwards. It's hard to believe only a handful of these pieces had previously been recorded. Harder to believe none is published – which this outstanding release surely looks set to change. **William Yeoman**

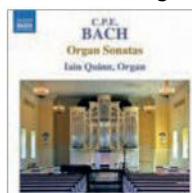
## CPE Bach

Organ Sonatas - Wq65/32 H135; Wq70/2 H134; Wq70/3 H84; Wq70/4 H85; Wq70/5 H86; Wq70/6 H87

Iain Quinn org

Naxos © 8 573424 (77' • DDD)

Played on the Paul Fritts organ of Miller Chapel, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ



If one needed a musical pick-me-up, nothing better could refresh a jaded ear than this sparkling, generously filled disc of the delightful sonatas that Emanuel Bach composed for Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia, Frederick the Great's sister, in around 1755. The five sonatas in the Wq70 collection are supplemented here by the Sonata in A, Wq65/32, originally composed in 1758 and later revised.

Although in later years Bach professed to being an indifferent organist, and composed far less for the instrument than his father, his surviving corpus of organ music is as well constructed, constantly refreshed (and refreshing) and elegant as anything else he wrote. Each sonata is cast in three movements, fast-slow-fast, and is written for manuals only – no pedals, since their dedicatee couldn't play them! Bach's fluid style mixes the athleticism of the *galant* with occasional passages of High Baroque two-part counterpoint. Melodic decoration abounds, alternating with arpeggiated arabesques. By way of contrast,

slow movements veer towards the melancholic, laden with appoggiaturas, generally in a clean three-part texture. Occasionally one is reminded of the slow movements in the voluntaries of Bach's almost exact English contemporary John Stanley: for example, the wistful *Adagio e mesto* in the Sonata in D, Wq70/5. Handel also springs to mind in the chunky opening *Allegro* of the Sonata in F, Wq70/3.

Working from the new CPE Bach Critical Edition, Iain Quinn thoroughly explores the possibilities of the 28 manual ranks of the two-manual Paul Fritts instrument of the Theological Seminary in Princeton. His light, clean touch coupled with an energetic panache will surely win over many new adherents to this little-known repertory. **Malcolm Riley**

## JS Bach • Bartók • Boulez

JS Bach Solo Violin Sonata No 3, BWV1005

Bartók Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117

Boulez Anthèmes. Anthèmes 2

Michael Barenboim vn

Accentus © ACC30405 (79' • DDD)



'It is a concert!' begins Michael Barenboim in the engaging booklet-notes he's written to accompany this recording. And indeed it is, beginning with the beautifully balanced programme itself, Boulez's two *Anthèmes* acting as ear-prickingly bright and theatrical bookends to Bartók's Sonata for solo violin and Bach's Sonata No 3 in C. Then there's the acoustic itself: non-studio recordings don't necessarily come with the guarantee of spatial atmosphere but Berlin's Jesus-Christus-Kirche is palpably present here. In fact, some listeners may find the extent to which the violin resonates around its walls, combined with relatively close miking, almost too overpowering. Still, there's something invigorating about the way in which you're grabbed by both shoulders and pulled right into the building from the opening swoop of *Anthèmes*.



'Ear-pricklingly bright and theatrical': Michael Barenboim plays Bach, Bartók and Boulez

As the programme continues, interconnecting threads are everywhere. Naturally the influence of Bach looms large over the Bartók and the Boulez, but so does that of Yehudi Menuhin; Bartók wrote his sonata for Menuhin after hearing him perform the Bach sonata, and almost 50 years later, in 1992, it was the Yehudi Menuhin Competition for which Boulez wrote the first of his *Anthèmes*. Then, of course, there's the sheer near-unplayability of all three composers' works.

Barenboim makes it all sound easy, though, with performances spilling over with life and drama. Every work's soul has been ignited and revealed, every second telling a story, all unmarred by a single glitch in intonation or articulation. The *Anthèmes*, with their cornucopia of violin techniques and effects, sound at times like musical liquid. Their *pizzicato* sections heap on further delights, pinging gloriously through the air. As for the Bach, this is strong and direct even in its tender moments; physical-sounding, but with the effortless physicality of a top athlete rather than being a Herculean struggle, and with each polyphonic strand characterfully voiced.

Decide for yourself whether the acoustic is overpowering or invigorating; this is indisputably exciting playing across an indisputably effective programme.

**Charlotte Gardner**

### JS Bach · Liszt · Reger

'A Tribute to JS Bach'

**JS Bach** Cantata No 29 - Sinfonia. Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 - Chaconne. Partita, BWV831 - Echo. Inventions - BWV777; BWV783

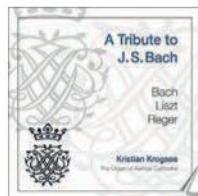
**Liszt** Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen, S180

**Reger** Fantasy and Fugue on the Name B-A-C-H, Op 46

**Kristian Krogsgåe** org

Danacord ® DACOCD773 (65' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Aarhus Cathedral, Denmark



This CD's ingenious programme celebrates the influence of Bach on 19th- and 20th-century composers, and its seven pieces fall neatly into three categories. First, Liszt's and Reger's compositions take themes by Bach for their musical inspiration; namely, the basso ostinato from the cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen*,

*Zagen* and the four-note motif derived from Bach's initials. Kristian Krogsgåe's virtuoso performances make light work of the technical demands but at the expense of some of the drama in Liszt's atmospheric quieter passages and Reger's epic fantasia. Secondly, the category of a straightforward transcription gives us the Sinfonia from Cantata No 29 in the arrangement by Guilmant – strikingly similar to the better-known version by his pupil Marcel Dupré.

The third category is arguably the most satisfying, with Bach's music being arranged for late-19th-century Romantic organs. Reger's skill in turning the Two-Part Inventions into trio sonatas via the addition of a third part for the left hand results in harmonies that are occasionally more akin to Reger than Bach. In the 'Echo' from the B minor Partita, Karg-Elert's enrichment of the original keyboard textures works well. Even better is Middelschulte's stunning arrangement of the magnificent solo violin Chaconne – a triumphant synthesis of ancient and modern.

The Aarhus organ is a good choice for this repertoire, but sadly the close-up recording does it a disservice. The

cathedral's generous acoustic is hardly in evidence, and the *tutti* sounds rather brittle and shrill. Fortunately, other recordings of this organ provide a more rounded and better balanced sound; meanwhile, on this CD we can enjoy Krogsoe's lively and colourful performances of some glorious music.

**Christopher Nickol**

### JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

**Jory Vinikour** hpd

Sono Luminus B ③ DSL92209 (154' • DDD)



Bach the inexhaustible. What we know about his music, from musicologists such

as Christoph Wolff and Michael Marissen, has been supplemented in recent years by the insights of performers, John Eliot Gardner and John Butt among them, and by topical assessments by critics such as Alex Ross. But when this richness of specialist and contextual information threatens surfeit, it's good to return to the music itself, just the notes, as they say.

That is precisely what this new release of the six solo keyboard Partitas by the Chicago-born harpsichordist Jory Vinikour provides. These are straightforward, uncluttered, direct performances that, if far from any stylistic cutting edge, deliver the notes earnestly and sincerely. As such, they fulfil their intent of providing a memorial to the late Huguette Dreyfus, Vinikour's teacher. He plays a beautiful double-manual German-style harpsichord by Thomas and Barbara Wolf, deftly captured by Sono Luminus.

The opening Sinfonia of the C minor Partita strikes as a trifle stiff, while a greater sense of space in the Ouverture of the resplendent D major could heighten its aura of French hauteur. Embellishments, generally abstemious by contemporary standards, seem largely reserved for the slow Sarabandes. The concluding Gigues, along with the single Capriccio, develop a healthy momentum, though occasionally erring on the side of caution.

When all is said and done, if you find yourself wanting more, the field is rich, including accounts by Koopman, Rousset and Pinnock, and by Mme Dreyfus herself.

**Patrick Rucker**

*Selected comparisons:*

Dreyfus (4/87<sup>th</sup>, A/15) (HERI) HTGCD292/3

Rousset (9/93<sup>th</sup>) (DECC) 475 7079

Pinnock (8/00) (HANS) CD92 115

Koopman (5/13) (CHAL) CC72574

### Bartók

Piano Sonata, Sz80. Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Csík District, Sz35a. Sonatina, Sz55.

Three Rondos on Slovak Folk Tunes, Sz84.

Études, Op 18 Sz72. Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, Sz110<sup>a</sup>

**Cédric Tiberghien, <sup>a</sup>François-Frédéric Guy** pfs

<sup>a</sup>Colin Currie, <sup>a</sup>Sam Walton perc

Hyperion F CDA68153 (66' • DDD)



Had Alfred Cortot recorded Bartók the results may have sounded a little like this: in other words, rhythmically free, colourful and frequently visited by a palpable sense of improvisation, the latter attribute very much Cédric Tiberghien's way. Idiomatic, though? Not so much.

To quote another of Bartók's piano works, the *Three Burlesques*, in Tiberghien's hands the Piano Sonata's first movement sounds rather more than 'a little bit tipsy' – 'just plain sozzled' would be nearer the mark. Though not quite as doggedly individualistic as Andreas Bach, it's oddly hesitant, as if attempting to temper the music's native violence with added flexibility. Tiberghien's very personal manner of playing is more effective in the second movement and in the racy, wildly dancing finale.

The *Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Csík District* open very slowly and dreamily. Again you're often left holding your breath between the fall of one note and the next. At the start of the Sonatina, the rhythm sounds oddly skewed, and even more distorted in the second movement. A longed-for simplicity of approach arrives with the *Three Rondos on Slovak Folk Tunes*, at least to start with – by the time Tiberghien reaches the *vivacissimo* he's up to his old tricks again, though the boogie-style *Allegro molto* is boldly assertive, with some vividly brushed arpeggios. The first of the Études seems at pains to sidestep any hint of aggression, inappropriately so in my view, given that this is profoundly propulsive music. The more Impressionist Second Étude and the energetically playful Third come off far better, though Zoltán Kocsis takes some beating, and so does Charles Rosen (Sony Classical, 10/64 – nla).

I really want to like this playing more than I actually do, whereas I loved Tiberghien's freewheeling approach to the Bagatelles and *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* on the previous (second) volume in this series (11/16). Still, all comes right in the end with an

admirable performance of the Sonata for two pianos and percussion, where Tiberghien is both goaded and kept in check by fellow pianist François-Frédéric Guy, with sensitive support from the percussionists Colin Currie and Sam Walton. Superb sound sees to it that every kicking syncopation and drum tap is clearly focused. Of the three volumes of Tiberghien playing Bartók I'd say that the second is definitely the one to go for first. See how you get on with that and then proceed accordingly. But if all you require is a compelling, jazzily inflected version of the Sonata for two pianos and percussion, then look no further. **Rob Cowan**

*Piano Sonata – selected comparison:*

A Bach (HANS) CD98 042

*Études – selected comparison:*

Kocsis (11/94<sup>th</sup>) (DECC) 478 2634DB8

### Bartók • Beethoven • Chopin

'Poetic Piano Sonatas'

**Bartók** Piano Sonata, Sz80 **Beethoven** Piano

Sonata No 21, 'Waldstein', Op 53 **Chopin** Piano

Sonata No 2, Op 35

**Olga Jegunova** pf

Music & Media F MMC114 (62' • DDD)



Poetry and music make for natural bedfellows and so Olga Jegunova's

generally pleasing programme of 'Poetic Piano Sonatas', in this context Beethoven, Chopin and Bartók – an unusual juxtaposition to say the least – is thoughtfully supplemented by chosen (printed) texts by Goethe, Pasternak and Abigail Parry. Whether you can marry the words to the music is something else, but it's worth a try.

Jegunova's performances are at their best in the slow movements, the *Waldstein's Adagio molto* thoughtfully poised with some sensitively calculated pauses, the transition into the closing Rondo achieved as if on the edge of a dream. This really is excellent playing, poetic indeed. In Chopin's Second Sonata, it's interesting that for the repeat Jegunova, like Maurizio Pollini, shoots straight back to the movement's *Grave* opening rather than opt for the more familiar option of returning to the *Doppio movimento* faster section (as, say, Horowitz, Simon Trpčeski, György Sebők and Vladimir Ashkenazy do). Not that it matters too much, but what does matter more, at least in my view, is Jegunova's tendency to bend the line with uncomfortably conspicuous hints of rubato, especially in the outer sections



Jory Vinikour plays Bach's Partitas on a beautiful double-manual German-style harpsichord by Thomas and Barbara Wolf

of the scherzo, while the Funeral March, although well played and tonally smooth, lacks climactic tension, and the ghostly *Presto* that follows it suggests, if I may poach a poetic allegory ‘choice’ of my own, a state of drunkenness ‘so as not to feel the horrible burden of time’ (Baudelaire). Any sense of blood-draining nocturnal fright is entirely lacking.

The Bartók Sonata’s first movement is again fairly free but Jegunova makes next to nothing of the contrasting dynamics; the various *sforzandos*, *fortissimos*, *fortes* and *pianos* all inhabit an even plain and the music comes across as tame. Again, the slow movement is best, while the finale projects a genuine sense of play.

There’s so much to admire here, specifically in terms of Jegunova’s vivid musical imagination, that I’d like to hear her playing in a live or at least a broadcast context, maybe a couple of rounds with this particular programme. As to the CD under review, a bit hit or miss, but evidence enough that Olga Jegunova is a name to watch. **Rob Cowan**

## Chopin

**Impromptu No 3, Op 51. Mazurkas - No 11, Op 17  
No 2; No 40, Op 63 No 2; No 41, Op 63 No 3.  
Nocturnes - No 2, Op 9 No 2; No 10, Op 32 No 2;**

No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 14, Op 48 No 2; No 15, Op 55 No 1; No 16, Op 55 No 2; No 18, Op 62 No 2.

Polonaise No 7, ‘Polonaise-fantaisie’, Op 61.

Waltz No 9, Op 69 No 1

**David Fray pf**

Erato © 9029 58964-7 (69' • DDD)



Remarkably, David Fray had kept Chopin out of his active repertoire for 15 years before recording this disc. It’s perhaps unsurprising, then, that it is a very considered, patient affair. Fray’s Chopin is not setting out to impress or knock anyone’s socks off; and the preponderance of Nocturnes and works of a nocturnal nature also suggests as much. But, as with his previous collection of Schubert (Editor’s Choice, 5/15), it is the poetry that shines through, the chaste sensuality, the gentle melancholy, not to mention the exquisitely pearly tone, captured in beautiful sound by the Erato engineers.

At the start of the disc, Fray’s right hand sings out the famous melody of the Op 9 No 2 Nocturne with beguiling tenderness. Listen to the care with which he picks out the bass notes in Op 48 No 1

or the gentle rippling of that work’s broken-chord middle section; he also manages to build the passion in the final minute within self-imposed restraints, creating a sophisticated tension. Throughout, you get the sense of his Nocturnes wanting to retreat into dreamlike Impressionism, resisting the temptation towards rhetorical grandeur. Where others might push forwards and outwards, Fray tends to rein himself in.

His approach suits the Mazurkas he chooses too, three of them peppered across the programme, as well as the single waltz. He brings a moving, touching tenderness to all of them – sample his gently lilting Op 63 No 3 for a taster. Fray’s approach is supremely seductive but it does occasionally sound as though he’s about to nod off, and for me the *Polonaise-fantaisie*, in particular, calls for a palette offering more than the muted moonlit blues that Fray employs. Sometimes, too, his rubato, in left-hand accompaniments, feels a little over-determined.

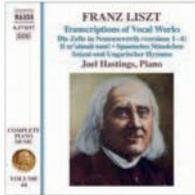
For all his reflectiveness and introspection, though, Fray manages never to sound merely self-regarding or indulgent. This is Chopin-playing of considerable seriousness and beauty.

**Hugo Shirley**

**Liszt**

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 44 - Transcriptions of Vocal Works' Autrefois (first version), S577*i* (Vielgorskij). Die Gräberinsel der Fürsten zu Gotha, S485*b* (Ernst). Ich liebe dich, S542*a*. Il m'aimait tant!, S533. Mes joies, S480 (Chopin). Romances oubliées - S527; S527*bis*. Slyepoi, 'Der blinde Sänger', S546. Spanisches Ständchen, S487 (Festetics). Szózat und Ungarischer Hymnus, S486 (Egressy/Erkel). Ungarisches Königslied, S544. Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth - four versions: S534*i*; S534*ii*; S167; S534.

**Joel Hastings** *pfs*  
Naxos M 8 573557 (76' • DDD)



Even today Liszt remains seriously underestimated as a song composer. Like his adored Schubert, simple lyrics of scant significance could evoke from Liszt inspired settings. A case in point is the poem 'Nonnenwerth' by Prince Felix von Lichnowsky, which occasioned an achingly poignant song that Liszt returned to over the course of four decades in no fewer than four settings for solo piano. These provide the framework of this 44th instalment of Naxos's series of the complete piano works, devoted to a lovingly selected group of transcriptions beautifully played by the Canadian-born pianist Joel Hastings.

Standouts among these fine performances are Festetics's 'Spanish Serenade', reminiscent of Liszt's more extended setting of Hugo's 'Gastibelza', a dreamy account of Chopin's 'Mes joies' and 'The Blind Singer', a vividly persuasive reading of Liszt's melodrama to a text of Alexey Tolstoy. Two versions of the *Romance oubliée* hint at the evolving refinement and delicacy clearly discernible in the 'Nonnenwerth' settings. In all the performances Hastings employs great variety of touch without over-playing, a sure sense of pacing and, most critically for this repertory, acute sensitivity to the original texts.

These performances were expertly recorded at St Peter's Church in Tallahassee, Florida, in January 2016 and, from a technical standpoint, are among the best in the Naxos series. The following May, Hastings, who served on the faculty of Florida State University, was felled by a fatal heart attack at the age of 46.

**Patrick Rucker**

**Liszt · Saint-Saëns**

Liszt Piano Sonata, S178 (arr Saint-Saëns). Après une lecture du Dante, S161 No 7 (arr Ancelle) Saint-Saëns Danse macabre, Op 40 (original version for two pianos). Danse macabre, Op 40 (arr Liszt/Horowitz/Ancelle) Ludmila Berlinskaya, Arthur Ancelle *pfs*  
Melodiya Ⓡ MELCD100 2463 (62' • DDD)



This is one of the finest two-piano recitals to come my way for quite some time – though I may be slightly biased as it has the world premiere of a work I have been waiting to hear ever since I first learnt of its existence over 30 years ago. The friendship and mutual respect of Liszt and Saint-Saëns has been well documented. Not so the existence of the latter's arrangement for two pianos of Liszt's B minor Sonata, one of the towering masterpieces of the solo repertoire.

Liszt himself always intended to make a two-piano version but never got around to it. Saint-Saëns undertook this labour of love between August and November 1914. It is an entirely faithful transcription – no hitherto unheard contrapuntal lines or remodelled harmonies – that relies entirely on the clever redistribution of material. But while freeing a single pianist from many of the immense technical difficulties of the original, the need for absolute ensemble precision and agreement on every aspect of agogics, pedalling and phrasing while retaining performance spontaneity in a work lasting almost half an hour make it in some ways even more difficult to execute for two pianists.

I can only say I was bowled over by the playing of this Franco-Russian husband-and-wife duo, astonished to the extent that any initial scepticism, any notion of this being a mere curiosity, is utterly confounded. Their performance of this music is everything and more that I had hoped for after such a long wait. Moreover, the satisfying programme opens with Saint-Saëns's two-piano version of his *Danse macabre* and closes with Liszt's (more interesting) transcription of the same with additions from Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Ancelle, whose own transcription of the *Dante* Sonata is a further major addition to the two-piano literature. For the repertoire, performances and recording (a pair of richly voiced instruments in the Grand Hall, Moscow Conservatory), this will be among my discs of the year. I only wish Melodiya had proof-read the English translation of the interesting booklet.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

**Mendelssohn**

'Mendelssohn and the Organ Sonata' Six Organ Sonatas, Op 65. Nine Pieces Without Opus Numbers Anders Eidsten Dahl *org*  
LAWO Classics M ② LWC1108 (106' • DDD)  
Played on the Hermann Eule organ of Sofienburg Church, Oslo



Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas, Op 65, date from the last part of his truncated career (1844) and were commissioned by the London publisher Charles Coventry. Drawing on some earlier material originating as far back as 1829, as well as newly minted music, Mendelssohn created a durable, melodically memorable, harmonically satisfying and richly varied set of six stalwarts which, since their first appearance in print in 1845, have maintained a central place in many organists' repertory, usefully providing both recital pieces and liturgical voluntaries. Although they require a fully developed manual technique (several movements are, frankly, idiomatically better suited to the piano) and demand varying degrees of pedal agility, they fully explore the organ's possibilities as an expressive instrument.

They also comfortably fit on a single disc. As a bonus Anders Eidsten Dahl has added a 36-minute CD of the nine organ pieces without opus numbers. These include what might best be termed prototypes of movements which went into the Op 65 set, and it is fascinating to compare first and second drafts. Dahl plays on a medium-size, 44-stop, three-manual organ in Oslo's Sofienberg Church. The warm acoustic's lack of reverberation suits this music, allowing Mendelssohn's contrapuntal mastery to be admired. The organ's 'Ekoverk' department is also ideal, being especially effective in the First Sonata.

Dahl's playing is robust in the strong, energetic music and delicately lyrical and expressive in the *Lieder ohne Worte*-like *andantes*. There are very few mistakes (just one misreading in the pedals in the first movement of Sonata No 3 and a misbalancing of the left-hand dynamic in the Cantilena of Sonata No 4).

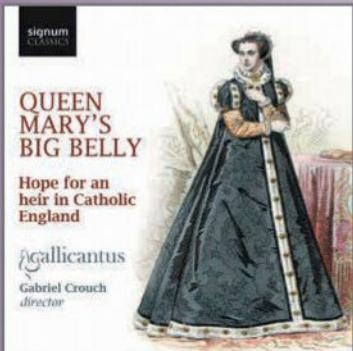
All in all this is a forthright, warm and polished account, enhanced by the bonus disc and excellent notes and packaging. A strong contender against other first-rate recordings.

**Malcolm Riley**

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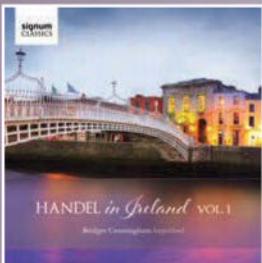
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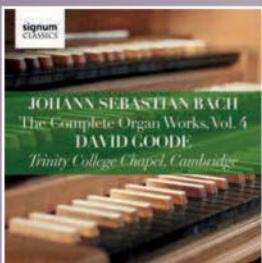
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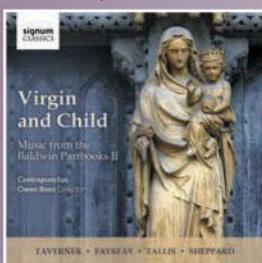
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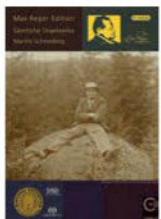
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'Max Reger Edition - Complete Organ Works'

**Martin Schmeding** orgCybele  17S051500 (19h 25' • DDD/DSD)

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The statistics are impressive. Seventeen CDs (one of which is given over to a conversation – entirely in German – between

Martin Schmeding and Mirjam Wiesemann), with a total playing time only a trifle shy of 20 hours. The 172-page booklet, alternating between German and an idiomatic English translation, is thick with archive photographs of Reger with various friends and acquaintances. It includes an entertainingly informative 50-page commentary on the music by Schmeding himself which cleverly traces each of the works through a chronological sequence, allowing ample scope for biographical insight. There are generous details and fine colour photographs of each of the 11 organs used. The recordings were made in 12 sessions covering in total some 45 days between March 2014 and July 2016, and no fewer than 21 different registrants were brought in to help manage these historic organs.

But the most impressive statistic is the music itself: 221 individual pieces contained within 28 opus numbers and part four of the list of Works Without Opus Numbers compiled by the Max-Reger-Institut. This represents less than a quarter of Reger's total output of 147 opus numbers and the eight-part WoO catalogue.

Amazingly, all these big numbers are handled by just two people. The entire Reger organ oeuvre is played by organist and Reger fanatic Martin Schmeding (who, if the double-page spread on pages 154 and 155 is anything to go by, models his physical appearance on Reger himself), while producer/engineer/editor/designer Ingo Schmidt-Lucas seems to have done just about everything else. He has not only produced first-class recordings of these various organs in vivid and real audio, but has handled what are, if the anecdotes in the booklet are anything to go by, some pretty awkward and unexpected obstacles during the sessions. Against this, the recently issued 16-disc Naxos set of Reger's complete organ works was recorded over a period of some 20 years by 12 organists on seven organs.

Reger's organ music comes in for a lot of stick, not least from organists themselves,

and phrases like 'turgid invention', 'dense chromaticism' and 'solid seriousness' are frequently associated with it. Martin Schmeding does something pretty remarkable here. He makes Reger's music not just utterly listenable to but hugely absorbing. Indeed, as well as bringing a brilliant technique and a searing musical mind to it, he adds a great deal of charm and, in places, humour. His playing simply oozes conviction, and on every one of these discs there are moments to savour. Where other organists find reams of dry fugues and complex wrappings around chorales little more than an excuse for technical display, Schmeding finds an opportunity for musical wit and rich organ colour. With his almost faultless delivery, this music unfolds with a tremendous sense of ease and naturalness.

I love the sprightliness he brings to the sixth of the Op 47 Trios (Vol 10) and the glorious sense of majesty he invokes in the great Fantasia on *Wie schön leucht' uns der Morgenstern* (Vol 4). In the big works Schmeding is more than a match for anyone else, but it is in the smaller and overlooked pieces that his uniquely perceptive approach to Reger is best revealed. Of course, there are moments of dreariness in these which not even Schmeding's enthusiastic advocacy can overcome. The tediously repetitive four-note theme of the *Basso ostinato* from the Second Suite (Vol 8) fully justifies the contemporary review quoted in the booklet-note, which described it as 'having artistic struggle as its goal'. But there are plenty of hidden gems, notably the three-minute *Alt niederrändisches Dankgebet* (Vol 13) which was, according to Schmeding, 'nothing more than a paid commission'. While this piece does not reveal great inventive powers on Reger's behalf, Schmeding uses the relatively modest 1906 Sauer organ of Neuzelle Abbey to such good effect (with 24 speaking stops, the smallest of the organs used) one can only hope it satisfied the original commissioners. (We do not know who they were, nor what Reger's fee was, although we read that he did write the dramatic one-minute *Praeludium* in C minor (Vol 13) in return for some 'fine lemonade'.)

With a single exception, all the organs used were built during Reger's own lifetime. The exception is the instrument in the St Nicholas Church in Leipzig – reputedly the largest organ in Saxony – which was originally built by Ladegast in 1862 before Wilhelm Sauer rebuilt it in 1902–03 (Vol 15). The largest organ of all is the massive 113-stop 1905 Sauer organ

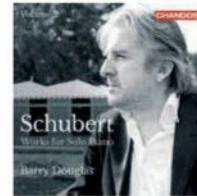
of Berlin Cathedral, used for a riveting performance of the rarely heard Sonata in F sharp minor (Vol 14). Only the somewhat cumbersome 1908 Sauer instrument of the Church of the Redeemer, Bad Homburg, sounds a little coarse around the edges in the four mighty Chorale Fantasias (Vols 4 and 5).

In every sense this a revelatory release, introducing some fabulous organs in vivid recorded sound, establishing Reger not just as a prolific composer but as an entertaining one too, and presenting an organist with real communicative instincts. **Marc Rochester**

**Schubert**

'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 2'

Piano Sonata No 20, D959. Impromptus, D899

**Barry Douglas** pfChandos  CHAN10933 (70' • DDD)

After launching his Schubert cycle in bold fashion with the final sonata, D960, Barry Douglas continues with two other works from the last year of Schubert's life. This is big, bold Schubert-playing, an approach that he applies equally to the Impromptus and the A major Sonata. I have to say right at the outset that I'm not mad about Chandos's recording, which seems over-resonant. That might account for why the 'fingeriness' of the Second and Fourth Impromptus doesn't really come across. Just the briefest of comparisons with Imogen Cooper (Avie, 7/10) or Maria João Pires (DG, 5/98) takes you into a completely different world. But Douglas does lend the C minor Impromptu plenty of rhetoric, while the G flat major has a fine eloquence and sense of line. Others colour it more tellingly, though, not least Lupu (Decca, 2/84) – superbly inward – and Zimerman (DG, 5/91), who imbues it with a rare depth of sorrow.

Rhetoric is to the fore in the A major Sonata too, with Douglas enjoying the contrast between chordal and triplet-writing in the opening movement. But what is sometimes obscured is an underlying sense of journeying that comes from a regular pulse; Shai Wosner's recent account (Onyx, 1/15) is impressive in this regard. The slow movement proceeds at a heavy tread, weighted with emotion. Perhaps too much so; by comparison Perahia (Sony Classical, 8/03) and Andsnes (EMI, 8/02) are pacier. And in the peace-shattering outburst, Douglas doesn't reach the same degree of intensity as Wosner. After a scherzo that is less



Barry Douglas with 'big, bold Schubert-playing' in the second volume of his survey for Chandos

precision-engineered than Perahia and Andnes, Douglas paces the finale well, but again I find some of the rubato a touch self-conscious. All of those mentioned above proceed with greater naturalness, and for haloed sound, coupled with incident, none compels more than Lupo. Brian Newbould's notes are a fine addition, however.

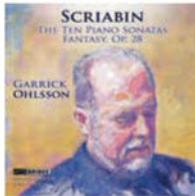
**Harriet Smith**

## Scriabin

Ten Piano Sonatas. Fantasie, Op 28

**Garrick Ohlsson** pf

Bridge Ⓛ ② BRIDGE9468 (148' • DDD)



Much of Garrick Ohlsson's Scriabin sonata cycle is remarkably literal, maybe shockingly so. It's as if the pianist were determined to reveal the facts behind the phantasmagoria, the music behind the mysticism, the notes behind the narcotics and the score behind the sex. As a result, the often loose-limbed Op 28 *Fantasie* gains considerable momentum, backbone and left-hand prominence. Rather than ride the dynamic waves resulting from the

disquieting undercurrents of the Fourth Sonata's *Prestissimo volando*, Ohlsson instead differentiates the textural strands and syncopated rhythms with X-ray clarity. Unlike many who race through No 2's swirling *Presto*, Ohlsson's measured pacing uncovers intricate inner melodies and rarely perceived polyphonic interplay between the hands. In No 1's *Adagio* and No 3's *Andante*, Ohlsson's attention to chord voicings and shapelier fluidity contrast with the relatively heavier, more wandering interpretations in Peter Donohoe's recent cycle (Somm, 2/17).

Notice, too, how Ohlsson distinctly spells out No 6's groaningly thick chords at all dynamic levels so that they're massive yet never fatty. One might say that Ohlsson's Sixth is to Otto Klemperer as Marc-André Hamelin's supple, crystalline reference version (Hyperion, 6/96) is to George Szell: a matter of apples and oranges. By observing No 7's tempo modifications and expressive indications with pinpoint economy, the paragraphs of static harmony turn uncommonly eventful. While some listeners might prefer more lightness and elfin thrust in No 8's *Allegro agitato* section, I warm to Ohlsson's yearningly inflected double

notes and the focus of his melodic trajectory. Both Nos 9 and 10 commence from a tonally disembodied ground zero and unfold with increasing multi-level intensity, even if the superbly executed chains of trills don't quite convey Horowitz's menacing impact.

I suspect that Ohlsson has lived longest with the Fifth; here his mind, fingers and heart most successfully merge. Ohlsson's tempos are not particularly fast, yet the performance's gripping ardency and note-to-note continuity resonate long after he stops playing. A worthy contender in the ever-growing Scriabin sonata cycle marketplace, with fine engineering and annotations. **Jed Distler**

## Vaughan Williams

**JS Bach** Ach bleib' bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV649 (arr Vaughan Williams)

**Vaughan Williams** The Lake in the Mountains. Introduction and Fugue<sup>a</sup>. Fantasia on a Thème by Thomas Tallis (arr Maurice Jacobson/Vaughan Williams)<sup>a</sup>. Hymn Tune Prelude on 'Song 13' (Orlando Gibbons). Fantasia on Greensleeves<sup>a</sup>.

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**Mark Bebbington, <sup>a</sup>Rebeca Omordia** pf/pfs  
Somm Céleste Ⓛ SOMMCD0164 (71' • DDD)

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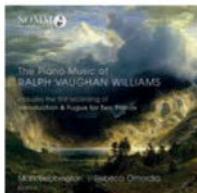
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Mark Bebbington and Rebeca Omordia play rare Vaughan Williams with 'unremitting logic, sweep and concentration'



Around the same time (1945–46) that Vaughan Williams was collaborating with Joseph Cooper on the two-piano transcription of his craggy Piano Concerto (1926–31), he wrote an an imposing stand-alone piece for the same medium entitled Introduction and Fugue. Both works were devised for Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith, who gave the premiere of the instrumental offering in March 1946, eight months before that of the concerto. It is, not to beat about the bush, a riveting creation which effortlessly holds the listener during its 17-minute course and also contains unmistakable and intriguing links with both of the composer's E minor symphonies – dip in from 12'20" onwards to hear thematic material from the Ninth heave into view.

Amazingly, this is its first CD recording – and a superb one it is, too, Mark Bebbington and Rebeca Omordia finding a unremitting logic, sweep and concentration that thrill to the marrow. They bestow comparably understanding advocacy upon the 1947 two-piano version

of the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* (made in conjunction with Maurice Jacobson, director of the music publishers Curwen) and the vernally fresh *Fantasia on Greensleeves* that RVW adapted for piano duet from his opera *Sir John in Love*.

As for the solo items, Bebbington gives ideally lofty and serene renderings of the evocative *The Lake in the Mountains* (which began life as an episode from the 1941 film score for *49th Parallel*), the exquisite *Hymn Tune Prelude on 'Song 13'* by Orlando Gibbons (written for Harriet Cohen in 1928) and that delectable treatment of Bach's *Ach bleib' bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ*, which first appeared in Oxford University Press's 1930 miscellany entitled *The Harriet Cohen Bach Book*. Bebbington's disarmingly deft touch likewise works wonders in the two sets of teaching pieces that close proceedings; the pithy Nocturne from *A Little Piano Book* (1934) is a wholly characteristic gem.

What a classy anthology this is, realistically recorded within the kind acoustic of Birmingham Conservatoire's Adrian Boult Hall, and boasting an extensive and authoritative booklet essay by Robert Matthew-Walker.

**Andrew Achenbach**

## Weitz · Jongen

**Jongen Quatre Pièces, Op 37.**

**Sonata eroïca, Op 94. Toccata, Op 104**

**Weitz Complete Organ Works**

**Peter Van de Velde** org

**Aeolus**  AE11091 (160' • DDD/DSD)

Played on the Pierre Schyven organ of Our Lady's Cathedral and the Bernard Pels & Son organ of the Sint-Laurentiuskerk, Antwerp



A quarter of a century has passed since Paul Derrett's pioneering survey of Guy Weitz's organ music, recorded in Hereford Cathedral, appeared on the Priory label. His single disc included both symphonies, bolstered by a quintet of separate movements. Now Peter Van de Velde has produced a handsome, benchmark two-disc set which includes all of Weitz's organ output, recorded on two substantial organs in Antwerp in superb SACD audio, with the addition of six pieces by his fellow Belgian Joseph Jongen. Van de Velde has been the titular organist at Antwerp Cathedral for the past 15 years and disc 1 was the last recording to be made on the Cathedral's 1891 Pierre Schygen

organ before its restoration last year. It still sounds to be in good tonal shape, despite some clattery action noise in the quieter moments.

Having been a star pupil of the organ with Guilmant and composition with d'Indy at the Scola Cantorum in Paris, Weitz (1883–1970) moved his family to London at the outbreak of the Great War, taking up the position of organist at the Jesuit Church, Farm Street, London, in 1917. Known to his choristers as 'Gee Whizz' he held the post for exactly half a century. Although he could be irascible and difficult there is little here that would be incomprehensible to the average listener. Idiomatically, Weitz could best be termed a 'post-Franckian', with a rich melodic vein, fond of healthy doses of twisting chromaticism (the best example being in the *De profundis clamavi*) and whole-note-ism reminiscent of Vierne. His output is uneven: the *Prelude on Salve regina* is, frankly, dull, whereas the charming Sicilienne has a beguiling lightness.

Due to the technical demands of the music, the two symphonies were recorded on the 1935 Bernard Pels & Son organ of St Lawrence Church. Here Weitz shows his mastery of larger forms. The First Symphony (1930) hangs together very well, its three movements being based on Gregorian themes. The middle movement is beautifully balanced, the ideal foil to the sparkling Toccata which follows. The rambling Second Symphony is twice the length of its predecessor, cast in five movements, the strongest of which is the Passacaglia, which grows organically and satisfactorily.

The finest performance of this release, however, is of Jongen's magnificent *Sonata eroica*, in which Van de Velde balances in perfect amounts the work's rhetorical thrust and limpid impressionism.

Malcolm Riley

## W Zimmermann

Aimide. Blaupause. Blueprint. The Missing Nail at the River. Romanska Bågar. Voces abandonadas<sup>c</sup>

Nicolas Hodges *pfs*

Wergo  WER7356-2 (76' • DDD)



A rare beast inside the world of German modern composition – a composer whose aesthetic spills out of John Cage and Morton Feldman – Walter Zimmermann's music has the capacity to drive those unwilling to square up to its provocations

seriously nuts. Zimmermann, now 67, has never penned a consciously dramatic note in his life. His basic vocabulary is founded upon simple, those-you-have-always-loved common triads. But his tendency to dice up stock harmonic sequences and scatter the fragments inside structural labyrinths designed to trash any sense of conventional syntax willingly pits material against form.

As the longest piece in this survey by Nicolas Hodges of the composer's recent piano music, Zimmermann's 38-minute *Voces abandonadas* (2005–06) challenges assumptions that narrative fluidity is a necessary compositional virtue with music that feels constantly on the verge of collapse. Based on two collections of aphoristic lines by the Argentinean poet Antonio Porchia, Zimmermann plays out in sound the paradox that aphorisms encapsulate ideas that are grander than their form. From Porchia's structures he generated what he terms as 514 'sentences', only ever a bar long or shorter, that are then simply rolled out in sequence. These disparate aphorisms, the booklet-notes tell us, accrue weight and begin 'to speak their own language' – true enough. But of greater intrigue, I'd argue, is that Zimmermann has actively denied his music any tools to develop. Each bar is a world of its own but the music never actually goes anywhere; no points of climax, arrival or disturbance can change the music's direction. Hodges plays with an appropriately dry, objectified tone, pedal kept at a minimum.

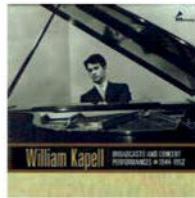
The shorter, filler pieces also exhibit material that bursts the banks of diminutive forms. The *Missing Nail at the River* (2003–04), suggested by Zimmermann's visit to the Charles Ives house in Danbury, Connecticut, is charm itself as superimposed elongations and compressions of Ivesian hymnic material play simultaneously and overlap on piano and toy piano. *Blaupause* (2003) and *Blueprint* (2004) are the same music – or, more specifically, *Blueprint* presents a negative image of the earlier piece, notes appearing where once there were rests, loud grace notes creating ripples of harmonic interference. This is seriously infatuating stuff. Philip Clark

## William Kapell

'Broadcasts and Concert Performances 1944–1952'

**JS Bach** Suite, BWV818<sup>a</sup>. Nun komm der Heiden Heiland, BWV659 (transcr Busoni)<sup>b</sup>. Concerto for Four Keyboards, BWV1065<sup>b</sup>. **Brahms** Intermezzo, Op 76 No 3<sup>a</sup>. **Chasins** Piano Playtime – No 6, Tricky Trumpet<sup>b</sup>. **Chopin** Mazurkas – No 2, Op 6 No 2<sup>a</sup>. No 40.

Op 63 No 2<sup>a</sup>. Nocturne No 1, Op 9 No 1<sup>c</sup>. Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58 – 3rd movt (opening)<sup>b</sup>. **Debussy** Children's Corner<sup>d</sup>. Estampes – No 2, La soirée dans Grenade<sup>c</sup>. Suite bergamasque<sup>a</sup>. **Falla** The Three-Cornered Hat – The Miller's Dance<sup>a</sup>. **Granados** Goyescas – The Maiden and the Nightingale<sup>b</sup>. **Liszt** Hungarian Rhapsody, S244 No 11<sup>d/g</sup>. **Mendelssohn** Song Without Words, Op 67 No 2<sup>b</sup>. **Mozart** Piano Sonatas – No 10, K330<sup>a</sup> – 3rd movt<sup>b</sup>; No 17, K570<sup>b</sup>. **Napolitano** El gato<sup>c</sup>. **Palmer** Toccata ostinato<sup>c</sup>. **Rachmaninov** Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43<sup>e</sup>. **Schubert** Ländler, D783<sup>b</sup> – No 7; No 12. **Schumann** Romance, Op 28 No 2<sup>c</sup>. Piano Quintet, Op 44<sup>i</sup>. **Shostakovich** Preludes, Op 34<sup>c</sup> – No 5; No 10; No 24. **R Strauss** Burleske<sup>f</sup>. William Kapell *pfs* with Joseph Battista, 'Eugene List', Rosalyn Tureck *pfs*, Fine Arts Quartet; NBC Strings / Milton Katims; Philadelphia Orchestra / Eugene Ormandy; Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Fritz Reiner Marston mono  ③ 53021-2 (3h 46' • ADD) Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, New York, February 28, 1945; <sup>a</sup>March 21, 1947; Pittsburgh, February 1, 1948; <sup>b</sup>Connecticut College, New London, CT, October 17, 1951; <sup>c</sup>Northwestern University, Chicago, November 21, 1951. Broadcast performances, <sup>d</sup>1947, <sup>e</sup>May 20, 1950, <sup>f</sup>June 9, <sup>g</sup>June 15, 1952



The death of William Kapell (1922–53) at the age of 31 in a plane crash robbed the world of an important musician, held as a role model for American pianists who emerged on the international scene after the Second World War, just as Leonard Bernstein paved the way for future American conductors. Kapell began recording for RCA Victor in his early twenties and left behind a significant though not very large studio discography. However, surviving broadcast and concert recordings considerably widen the scope of Kapell's artistic legacy, such as the contents of this three-disc anthology, produced by Donald Manildi, curator of the International Piano Archives at Maryland (IPAM). Almost everything is new to CD, with about two-thirds of the contents appearing in print for the first time.

Disc 1 includes all of the surviving material from a pair of Carnegie Hall recitals given in 1947 and 1945, including the newly released Chopin F minor Mazurka, Op 63 No 2, and Napolitano's charming miniature *El gato*. Even without knowing Kapell's identity, one immediately zeroes in on his pianism's impressive clarity, assurance, specificity of projection and seemingly contradictory tensile

lyricism. The latter is particularly evident in Chopin's Op 9 No 1 Nocturne, Debussy's 'La soirée dans Grenade' and the Sarabandes from Bach's A minor Suite. Robert Palmer wrote his brief yet explosively inventive *Toccata ostinato* for Kapell, and the dedicatee delivers an electrifying yet meticulously detailed reading, yet to be surpassed.

An exciting romp through Strauss's *Burleske* from a 1948 Pittsburgh Symphony concert fills out the disc. At conductor Fritz Reiner's insistence, Kapell had to learn the work literally from scratch just days before the event, and the pianist was distinctly unhappy with his playing. As a consequence, the family never permitted this aircheck's posthumous publication until now. Yet, in truth, the rough patches matter little; Kapell's command and focus are quite remarkable given the excruciating circumstances.

In addition to a vibrant Ormandy/Philadelphia collaboration from 1944 in Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody* (albeit not on the Kapell/Reiner studio version's leonine level), disc 2 offers two superb and recently discovered 1952 live-in-studio broadcasts aired by the New York station WQXR, highlighted by an animated yet subtly nuanced Granados 'The Maiden and the Nightingale' (from *Goyescas*).

Disc 3 finds Kapell on peak form in excerpts from a 1951 Connecticut College recital (Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* fares better here than in the pianist's 1953 Australian broadcast issued by RCA), and in a propulsive yet poetic Schumann Piano Quintet. The generally seamless execution of the interweaving solo piano parts in Bach's Concerto after Vivaldi for four keyboards honestly doesn't allow individual contributions to stand out, which was probably the point. First-rate restorations and annotations typify the Marston label's high standards, and add value to a release that Kapell acolytes cannot afford to miss.

**Jed Distler**

## 'Elective Affinities'

**Beethoven** Egmont, Op 84 – Overture **Chasins**  
**Prelude**, Op 12 No 3 **Chopin** Mazurka No 41,  
Op 63 No 3 **Fontana** Mazurka, Op 21 No 2  
**Gershwin** The man I love **Godowsky**  
Renaissance – No 10, Courante **Katsaris**  
Goodbye, Mr Rachmaninov. Merci Monsieur  
Chopin... **Liszt** Hungarian Rhapsody, S244 No 13  
**Loeillet** Lessons for the Harpsichord, Vol 3 –  
No 3, Courante **Mendelssohn** Suleika, Op 34  
No 4 **Poulenc** Novelette sur un thème de  
Manuel de Falla **Rachmaninov** Prelude, Op 23  
No 2 **Ravel** Ma Mère l'Oye - Laideronnette,  
impératrice des pagodes **Schumann** Carnaval,  
Op 9. Novelette, Op 21 No 1 **Schütt** Paraphrase

on 'Wiener Blut' (J Strauss II) **Vladigerov**  
Impressions, Op 9 – No 8, 'Passion'

**Wang Jian Zhong** Liuyang River  
**Cyprien Katsaris** pf  
Piano21 (F) P21 055 (79' • DDD)



*Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is claimed by the booklet writer to be 'possibly the best novel' by Goethe. 'It refers to the phenomenon that can result when two chemical compounds come into contact. If the affinity is strong enough, elements may detach themselves from either compound, free to combine anew with each other.' The title translates as 'Elective Affinities' or, alternatively, 'Kindred by Choice'.

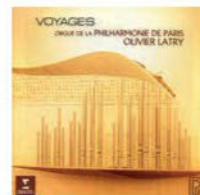
Cyprien Katsaris was inspired to assemble a programme with such affinities. Thus Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture (heard here in an arrangement by an unknown hand which Katsaris suggests may be by the composer himself) originates in a play by Goethe; Mendelssohn's song 'Suleika' (arranged by Liszt) originates in a poem by one of Goethe's muses. There's a *Nouvelette* by Schumann followed by one from Poulenc; a Courante by Loeillet followed by Godowsky's free transcription of the same piece; two dances from the Austro-Hungarian empire – Eduard Schütt's dazzling paraphrase of Johann Strauss II's *Weiner Blut* and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 13. And so forth. (The Schütt is one of four premiere recordings on this disc, though the Mazurka by Fontana is not one as claimed.)

For me, Katsaris is one of the greatest living pianists, a phenomenon who straddles the entire literature of his instrument (with a few blind spots). Perhaps it is his astonishing fluency, the unintentional impression he gives of everything coming easily to him; perhaps it is his ability as an improviser, his willingness to embrace popular music and film themes, his penchant for playing some piano concertos (the *Emperor*, Liszt A major) and symphonies (Mozart No 40, for instance) as solos that lead some to view him with suspicion, attaching labels like 'superficial', 'shallow' and 'showy'. Well, let them listen to this varied selection of 19 works and tell me the name of another living pianist who could do the same with such stylish command and such palpable glee in the task he has set himself while evincing in the process such love for the piano.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'Voyages'

**JS Bach** Cantata No 29 – Sinfonia  
**Debussy** Préludes, Book 1 – No 10, La cathédrale engloutie **Falla** El Amor brujo – Ritual Fire Dance  
**Fauré** Pelléas et Mélisande – Sicilienne  
**Khachaturian** Gayane – Sabre Dance  
**Liszt** St François de Paule marchant sur les flots, S175 No 2 **Mendelssohn** Variations sérieuses, Op 54 **Rimsky-Korsakov** Flight of the Bumble Bee **Saint-Saëns** Danse macabre, Op 40 **Wagner** Tristan und Isolde – Prelude and Liebestod  
**Olivier Latry** org  
Erato (F) 9029 58885-0 (79' • DDD)  
Played on the Rieger organ of the Philharmonie de Paris



Enormously popular in the first half of the 20th century and largely forgotten and generally reviled during the second half, the organ transcription has swung back into fashion. When organists of the calibre of Olivier Latry release discs of transcriptions, you know that it has come full circle and is once again recognised as a legitimate genre worthy of serious consideration.

Not every transcription on this disc is completely convincing. Kalevi Kiviniemi's version of Khachaturian's 'Sabre Dance' has something of the character of a medieval joust about it, while Léon Roques's version of 'La cathédrale engloutie' is notably devoid of the swirling atmosphere that makes Debussy's original so memorable. On the other hand, both Reger and Dupré offer intriguing and distinctly personal views on the music of, respectively, Liszt and Bach, while Liszt himself (Chopin) and the great master of organ transcription Edwin Lemare (Wagner and Saint-Saëns) show how it is possible to create wholly idiomatic organ music without sacrificing the essence of the original. My personal favourite is the beautifully crafted version of Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses* by Reitze Smits, and the most impressive is Latry's own spectacular take on Falla's 'Ritual Fire Dance', which ends with such outrageous virtuosity that one suspects only Latry could have got away with it.

Musically convincing or not, what every piece on this colourful disc offers is both a dramatic display of Latry's breathtaking virtuosity and a glorious aural picture of this huge 91-stop Rieger, installed in the Paris Philharmonie in late 2015. To hear an organist of such talent and an instrument of such remarkable versatility put through their paces like this is a must for all lovers of the big organ sound.

**Marc Rochester**

# Thomas Adès

Vanishing spirals, time, entrapment and reference: *Pwyll ap Siôn* explores what characterises this British composer's works

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the premiere of Thomas Adès's *Asyla* for large orchestra, whose dynamic synthesis of primal power, rhythmic intensity, melodic invention and lyrical subtlety prompted many to hail it as a contemporary classic and latter-day *Rite of Spring*, with which it shares a certain Dionysian abandon.

While *Asyla* remains Adès's most well-known and widely performed work – having within 10 years of its premiere received more than a hundred performances – it is worth pausing momentarily to retrace the steps that led the composer to this extraordinary piece, and the direction his music has taken since then.

A gifted pianist and talented composer, Adès studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama as a junior student before reading music at King's College, Cambridge, where his teachers included Alexander Goehr and Robin Holloway. In different ways, both left their mark on Adès's early works: Goehr in terms of instilling a sense of formal control and methodological rigour, and Holloway in allowing past historical models, idioms and allusions to filter through into his music.

*'Adès's music has often navigated a course between polarities, resulting at times in a rich synergetic alchemy'*

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Adès's early compositions – many of which were written while he was still a Cambridge undergraduate – is an inherent fluency that appears to have emerged naturally from a creative wellspring that had fully absorbed, mastered and reinterpreted the then-current techniques and practices of contemporary music. However, Adès was already developing his own voice, for example in the *Chamber Symphony* (1990). On one level, the work displays several textbook modernist traits, such as complex multilayering, polyrhythmic patterns and processes, the use of extended techniques, extreme instrumental registers and an emphasis on both individual dexterity and ensemble virtuosity. But it is also multilayered in its musical reference and historical resonances, fragments of quotes bubbling underneath before being propelled to the surface by magnetic forces latent in the musical material itself.

Many subsequent works leading up to the composer's first opera, *Powder Her Face* (1995), grappled with similar issues, from the inventive and dazzlingly colourful *Living Toys* (1993) for chamber ensemble to the more introspective *Arcadiana* (1994) for string quartet. The latter's sixth movement, 'O Albion', represents something of a departure, being the first to allude more or less explicitly to a past historical model



Adès: shaping time in music is a preoccupation for this British composer

(in this case, Elgar) to evoke a sense of lost innocence and nostalgia. In its direct tonal style and serene simplicity, 'O Albion' was in its own way as stubbornly radical as the complex, uncompromising *Living Toys*.

Complex or simple, modern or postmodern, hermetically sealed or replete with cultural significations, Adès's music has often navigated a course between these polarities, resulting at times in a rich synergetic alchemy. One of his most immediately compelling and powerful works is the two-act *Powder Her Face* – a vivid and visceral portrayal of the colourful and celebrated life of Margaret Campbell, the Duchess of Argyll. Adès's borrowing of references and allusions expose the lurid, subversive and sensationalist aspects of the duchess's life. The opera pillages from all manner of forms and styles, including a Carlos Gardel tango and other popular dance forms, 1930s light song and the repertoire associated with the Palm Court Orchestra, Jack Buchanan, Paul Anka, 1950s pop songs, Walton's *Façade*, Berg's *Lulu*, Janáček and Stravinsky, all of which prompted Harrison Birtwistle to observe that Adès can't make a musical move without relating to something historically: 'Nearly everything

**ADÈS FACTS**

**Born** London, March 1, 1971.  
**Piano prize** He won second prize in the piano category of the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition in 1989.

**Composition studies**

Alexander Goehr and Robin Holloway were his teachers at the University of Cambridge (1989-92).

**Directorships** He was the first music director of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, 1998-2000, and served as artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival, 1999-2008.

**Best-known piece** *Asyla* (1997), which won the Grawemeyer Award in 2000.

relates to something else, a model.' At the same time, a parallel process informed by the music's own internal models is set out in Adès's opera: a grizzly double-edged paradox places the duchess as both architect and victim of her own downfall. The music's inherent logic serves to deepen the Duchess's sense of desperation as the world she once possessed is squandered away by excesses of various kinds.

Adès has described *Powder Her Face* as an opera about a woman who finally becomes entrapped in 'a world of perfume and fantasy and memory'.

Entrapment also informs his other two operatic works, both of which mark different periods in the composer's development. *The Tempest* (2003), his three-act opera based on Shakespeare's play, sees its shipwrecked characters trapped on an island controlled by Prospero's magic. *The Exterminating Angel* (2015), also in three acts and based on Luis Buñuel's surrealist film, is set at a dinner party that never ends, where characters drift from one inescapable situation to another. Premiered in Salzburg in July 2016, it receives its first UK performance at the Royal Opera House, London, next month.

Adès's operas are in a sense 'summative', building on technical puzzles and challenges explored in previous works, while the orchestral pieces are catalytic, providing opportunities for the composer to strike out in new directions, initiating new phases.

*The Exterminating Angel* is ostensibly about time standing still and, by extension, the end of time. Shaping time in music has, of course, preoccupied composers throughout history, but it's a theme that especially concerns Adès. *Asyla* addresses the notion of being trapped in time, as heard most forcibly in the pulsing third movement, 'Ecstasio', the composer's paean to electronic dance music of the mid-1990s. *Polaris*

(2010) for orchestra engages with a kind of cosmic time, while *In Seven Days* (2008) is about time contracting and expanding.

Adès achieves this never-ending notion of suspended time not so much through rhythmic or metric means (although he has increasingly employed stasis and repetition in more recent works), but by a spiralling succession of staircase-like harmonic wedges in fourths and fifths. These patterns are heard in an almost endless series of variations and transformations at the beginning of many works (and often at the end, too, in a process that takes the music full circle), looping around in ever-endless motion towards a tonal horizon that is rarely fully achieved. Paul Driver has suggested that these vanishing spirals have their origins in Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, though Ligeti's second piano étude, *Cordes à vide*, with its expanding and contracting motion, may also have served as a reference point.

Already heard at the beginning of *Arcadiana*, this temporal trope becomes the central idea in many later compositions, including the Violin Concerto (*Concentric Paths*, 2005), where it forms the subject of a dialectical struggle between soloist and orchestra, and *Tevot* (2007) for orchestra, where it becomes part of a symphonic argument that, in the end, generates an infinite entropy of vanishing spirals.

Underpinning his use of such spiral harmonies is Adès's belief that notes are pushed and pulled around by magnetic forces that attract or repel. When a note is struck, a whole nexus of possibilities comes into play. The role of the composer is to explore some of these relationships. As Adès notes: 'The impulse comes first, the method second.' The subversive force contained within each note to disobey and rebel has compelled Adès to evolve an 'irrational' harmonic logic that, in a work such as *America: A Prophecy* (1999) for mezzo and large orchestra, forces the listener to stare into the dystopian abyss and aftermath of Judgement Day – and to face, head-on, the destruction of time itself. **6**

**LISTEN TO ADÈS**

A host of riches on disc which span much of his career

**Powder Her Face**

Soloists; Almeida Ensemble / Thomas Adès  
EMI Classics (9/98)

This captivating work brings together all the elements of Adès's early style. It's everything music theatre should be: witty, flamboyant and sardonically funny while also providing moments of serious reflection, consideration and identification. This opera is a must-hear as well as a must-see.

**In Seven Days**

Nicolas Hodges pf London Sinfonietta / Thomas Adès  
Signum Classics (5/12)

This is a vivid, programmatic piano concerto in which Adès explores extremes of simplicity and complexity. It is impeccably performed on this recording, which includes a DVD with visuals by Tal Rosner.

**Asyla, Tevot, Polaris**

LSO / Thomas Adès  
LSO Live

Out in March, and due to be reviewed next issue, this includes the heavyweight symphonic works *Asyla*, *Tevot* and *Polaris*, each approaching the orchestral medium from a new angle and demonstrating Adès's mastery of the form.

# Vocal



David Patrick Stearns on Christian Gerhaher's Brahms:  
*'Gerhaher's colouring is more precise and apt than I've ever heard from him. And that is saying a lot'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



Ivan Moody listens to choral music by Paweł Szymański:  
*'The colours are evocative of the distant past, buried under sand or the layers of later civilisations'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

## Brahms

Die schöne Magelone, Op 33

**Christian Gerhaher bar** **Gerold Huber pf**

Sony Classical ® 88985 41312-2 (54' • DDD • T/t)



Though recorded periodically and treated as a cultural touchstone in

German-speaking countries, Brahms's *Die schöne Magelone* still leaves seasoned English-speaking audiences asking, 'What, exactly, is it?'

What looks like a Lieder cycle is better compared to songs in Shakespeare plays. The Magelone texts in the 1797 Johann Ludwig Tieck novel function as poetic interludes, but even when set to substantial music by the young Brahms (finished in 1869), they still decorate the story rather than telling it. Still, the 15 songs in the collection need some sort of plot context, if only to tell which of the novel's characters are singing and why. Narration is heard in the German release of this disc – in a tightened version by Martin Walser. But English-speaking listeners must rely on the booklet or on [kellydeanhansen.com](http://kellydeanhansen.com), which also gives structural analysis of the songs.

The piece requires more effort than usual, though this new Christian Gerhaher/Gerold Huber recording rewards such a listening commitment. They aren't just in peak form but create a polar opposite experience to the piece's 1971 reference recording by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Sviatoslav Richter (now available on the EMI/Warner Icon Box devoted to Richter). Fischer-Dieskau and Richter project youthful brashness with explosive musical contrasts plus a swaggering portrayal of Peter (the knight who is central to the story and sings most of the songs). They also make you aware that this music is un-codified Brahms. Forms are fluid, with strophic songs suddenly morphing into something else. Musical ideas don't follow each other as thoughtfully as in later Brahms.

In contrast, Huber looks for ways to make the music more integrated and coherent while also exploring the harmonic content, and he has a warmer recording acoustic than Richter. Fischer-Dieskau's Peter is a confident conquerer, while Gerhaher's is a lover, a complex neurotic one in a characterisation moulded from a keen look at what the poetry tells us. Peter's 'timid face' in the fifth song seems to dictate a lot of the softer, more awed-sounding vocal colours that Gerhaher brings to some of the other songs. In fact, his colouring is more precise and apt than I've ever heard from him. And that's saying a lot. However impressive and charismatic Fischer-Dieskau and Richter are (and Richter finds great meaning in the humblest transitional passage), Gerhaher and Huber make the piece something you can take to your heart.

Narration might make it even better. Two now-deleted Teldec *Magelones* show how well that can be done: the 1994 Brigitte Fassbaender recording (10/94) using the narration as breathing space between her stentorian vocal turns, and the 2000 Christoph Prégardien recording (12/00) having English narration by none other than Vanessa Redgrave. Alan Blyth found her to be 'a shade affected' but, with my new-found affection for *Die schöne Magelone*, I'd welcome it back.

**David Patrick Stearns**

*Selected comparison:*

*Fischer-Dieskau, Richter (11/71) (EMI/WARN) 217411-2*

## Cesarini

Fetonte, e non ti basta. Fili, no'l niego, io dissi  
(*La Gelosia*). Già gl'augelli canori (*L'Arianna*).

Penso di non mirarvi. Oh dell'Adria reina.

V'è una bella tutta ingegno

**Stéphanie Varnerin sop**

**L'Astrée / Giorgio Tabacco hpd**

Aparté ® AP136 (70' • DDD • T/t)



According to the 17th-century intellectual Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni,

the composer Carlo Francesco Cesarini was the equal of Stradella, Bononcini and Alessandro Scarlatti, producing music of outstanding quality. History, however, has reduced him from an equal to a footnote – barely represented in *Grove*, let alone the recording catalogue. Now, for the first time, contemporary listeners can make up their own minds thanks to this disc of Cesarini's solo cantatas – premiere recordings all.

Making a strong case for Cesarini's quality is the composer's librettist and patron, Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili. A supporter of Corelli, Bononcini and Handel, Pamphili's ear for musical quality is borne out by the distinctive melodic personality of these chamber cantatas. All secular, they each set the longings and laments of the unrequited lover, mostly expressed in the charged verses of Pamphili himself.

Lively with dance rhythms and unfettered by the formality of *da capo* conventions, the arias unfold with ingenuous, folk-like simplicity, occasionally even featuring catchy little refrains – somewhere between popular song and opera. Jealousy storms and rages in the plunging intervals of 'E di Tantalo i sospiri' (from *Fili, no'l niego, io dissi*), while summer breezes play in the fluttering vocal decorations of 'So che giammai' (from *Ob dell'Adria reina*) and a lover coaxes in flirtatious syncopations in 'E'il mio timore' (also from *Fili, no'l niego, io dissi*). The framing recitatives are more sophisticated affairs, their drama condensed into concise, rhetorical outpourings, often coloured with telling gestures from the continuo cello.

Led from the harpsichord by Giorgio Tabacco, the musicians of L'Astrée deliver unaffected performances that recognise the delicacy of these simple works and never overstate their musical case. Soprano Stéphanie Varnerin also keeps things understated, but her off-the-breath delivery does have its drawbacks, preferring to skim the musical surface rather than risk a more muscular, operatic delivery. The effect is pleasantly intimate, casual even, but



Mark Elder and his Hallé forces offer deeply felt accounts of choral Elgar and Bax, including works with wartime associations

perhaps more suited to a concert setting than to a recording.

Could Cesarini yet find a place alongside Stradella and Scarlatti in the repertoire? It's too early to tell, but let's hope others follow L'Astrée's lead and give us a fuller picture of this idiosyncratic composer.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## Elgar • Bax

'For the Fallen'

**Bax** *In memoriam*<sup>a</sup> **Elgar** *Grania and Diarmid*, Op 42<sup>b</sup>. *The Spirit of England*, Op 80<sup>c</sup>. *A Voice in the Desert*, Op 77<sup>d</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Jennifer France, <sup>b</sup>Rachel Nicholls *sop*, <sup>c</sup>Madeleine Shaw *mez*, <sup>d</sup>Joshua Ellicott *narr* Hallé <sup>e</sup>Choir and Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder  
 Hallé (CDHLL7544 (67' • DDD • T/t)  
<sup>f</sup>Recorded live at The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, <sup>g</sup>November 6, 2014; <sup>h</sup>April 7, 2016



Here's another welcome helping of choral Elgar courtesy of Mark Elder and his Hallé forces, this time in the context of an imaginative programme with wartime associations. Composed between 1915 and

1917, *The Spirit of England* (settings of poems by Laurence Binyon) remains grievously underrated, and Elder's thrusting urgency in the cantata's outer movements ('The Fourth of August' and 'For the Fallen') contrasts strikingly with the more grandiloquent view adopted by Alexander Gibson on his memorably eloquent 1976 version (Chandos, 5/77). The latter also has the conspicuous advantage of Teresa Cahill – gloriously steady and golden in tone throughout – but Elder's remains a stirring display nonetheless. It's followed by a highly effective presentation of the 1916 melodrama *A Voice in the Desert*. Soprano Jennifer France is in radiant voice and narrator Joshua Ellicott's refreshingly natural delivery of the English text most empathetic (his Lancashire accent made me stop and think about those many mill-town 'pals' who perished at the Front).

Next comes a sensitive realisation of the three numbers that comprise Elgar's 1901 incidental score to the drama by George Moore and WB Yeats, *Grania and Diarmid*. The darkly magnificent Funeral March is an especially inspired creation, while the atmospheric horn call that launches the Introduction was picked up by Arnold Bax in his 1909 tone poem *In the Faery Hills*.

Shaken to the core by the events of the 1916 Easter Uprising and the consequent execution of Pádraig Pearse, Bax responded with a number of works, among them this impressive *In memoriam*, the full-score manuscript of which came to light only in 1993. Listen out for the ravishing B major tune that Bax recycled three decades later in his music for David Lean's big-screen adaptation of *Oliver Twist*. Elder's deeply felt account all but matches the slumbering intensity of Vernon Handley's distinguished premiere recording with the BBC Philharmonic (Chandos, 7/99).

Complete with superior production values, exhaustive booklet-notes and full texts, this stimulating collection deserves every success. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Liszt

'Forgotten Liszt'

*Angiolin dal biondo crin*, S269 (first version). *Élegie*, S301. *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*, S293. *Die Lorelei*, S273 (two versions). *Quand tu chantes bercée*, S306a. *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*, S270. *Die tote Nachtigall*, S291. *Vergiftet sind meine Lieder*, S289 (first version). *Wenn die letzten Sterne bleichen*

**Benjamin Brecher** ten **Robert Koenig** pf  
 MSR Classics (MS1538 (68' • DDD • T/t)



It's difficult to escape the air of academicism surrounding this disc, which was

programmed by the musicologist-conductor Michael Vitalino while researching Liszt's work at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where Benjamin Brecher and Robert Koenig teach voice and piano respectively. The original *Petrarch Sonnets* are flanked by genuine rarities or rarely heard versions of comparatively familiar songs. Inevitably, the disc invites comparison with Hyperion's ongoing Liszt edition, which it also pre-empts by including a number of previously unrecorded items.

As so often, one is faced by the complexity and variability of Liszt's reworkings of his own material. His elegiac first attempt at 'Vergiftet sind meine Lieder' is so far removed in style from its better-known revisions as to constitute a separate work, though the first 'Die Lorelei' seems like a sketch for the great song it eventually became: the expanded French version from 1883, 'La Loreley', is also included. 'Quand tu chantes bercée', thought to be unfinished (it only came to light in 1972), is 'completed' on this occasion by the strophic addition of a further stanza from Victor Hugo's poem.

Brecher's experience in the *bel canto* repertory shows in clean lines and clear diction, and he compensates for some hardness of tone at the top with a finely shaded *mezza voce* when singing softly. He loses out in the *Petrarch Sonnets*, though, to Matthew Polenzani's ease and rapture for Hyperion, while the first 'Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher' ideally needs a dramatic soprano: the big descending arpeggios at its close are a bit unwieldy here. Elsewhere, however, there is much to enjoy: 'Quand tu chantes' is particularly delicious. Koenig, meanwhile, doesn't match Julius Drake in terms of sweep and subtlety, though his playing is nicely focused, lapidary and un-showy. **Tim Ashley**

*Petrarch Sonnets – selected comparison:*

Polenzani, Drake (1/11) (HYPE) CDA67782

## Martinů



This is a singularly exotic issue for Czechs and non-Czechs alike. Four cantatas are

collected here, written by Martinů between 1956 and 1959 (the year he died), during the composer's phase of renewed interest in Moravian folk poetry, and all based on verses by Miloslav Bureš set in the Bohemian-Moravian hills. Fortunately, Supraphon provides full translations (which makes one wonder whether a piece entitled 'The Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops' would have had much success in the Anglophone world of 1956), and the composer's sensitivity to the rhythms of his native language and inventiveness with regard to instrumental colour are in any case more than enough to retain the non-Czech-speaking listener's interest. It should be noted that the editions used are the corrected versions issued by the Bohuslav Martinů Complete Edition.

The potato-top cantata (*Legenda z dýmu bramborové nati*) is scored for soprano, contralto and baritone soloists, mixed choir, recorder, clarinet, horn, accordion and piano, which must surely rank as one of the most exotic ensembles ever conceived, and Martinů being Martinů he knows exactly how to exploit such a bizarre group to the utmost. There is a curious and engaging mixture of the homespun and the exotic about it, and the story itself is certainly not lacking in drama. It is also beautifully performed – soprano Pavla Vykopalová is particularly impressive with her incisive tone, vibrato used with great discretion – and there is also a political dimension in that the composer, in protest against the suppression of the Hungarian revolution, refused to send it to Czechoslovakia in time for its first scheduled performance. The other cantatas have slightly less unusual scorings – *Otvírání studánek* ('The Opening of the Springs'), in addition to narrator, three soloists and female chorus, requires only two violins, viola and piano, while *Romance z pampelišek* ('Romance of the Dandelions') requires soprano and tenor soloists, mixed choir and 'drumming on chair', and *Mikeš z hor* ('Mikeš of the Mountains') is scored for soprano and tenor soloists, mixed choir, two violins, viola and piano.

Narration in musical compositions is always a challenge, and in *Otvírání studánek* I do not really feel that Martinů rose to it. The dramatic thread conjured by the wonderfully colourful musical episodes is constantly slowed by the narrator, who

is no Cocteau. *Romance z pampelišek*, on the other hand, is a delightful pastoral evocation of love, with some outstanding choral writing. Is it possible that this outstanding performance of such a rewarding work might inspire choirs in Western Europe to take it up (the chair drumming may even be an added incentive)? *Mikeš z hor* is another sophisticated riot of colour, utterly engaging in its directness, and the more moving when one remembers that it was written in the year of the composer's death.

I cannot imagine these cantatas being better performed or recorded than here; Lukáš Vasilek is an outstanding conductor, and the Prague Philharmonic Choir respond to his every interpretative intuition. Very highly recommended. **Ivan Moody**

## Mendelssohn

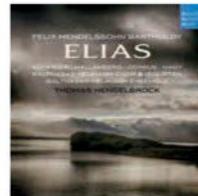
*Elijah*, Op 70 (sung in German)

Genia Kühmeier sop Ann Hallenberg contr

Lothar Odinius ten Michael Nagy bar

Balthasar Neumann Chorus, Soloists and Ensemble / Thomas Hengelbrock

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi M ② 88985 36256-2  
(120' • DDD • S/T). Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Dortmund, January 29, 2016



Of Mendelssohn's works only the *Scottish* and *Italian* symphonies had a longer, more fraught gestation than *Elijah*. The composer wanted it to become a keystone of the English oratorio tradition almost as much as the cathedral cities and their festivals did. During the last few decades, however, *Elijah* has prospered much more in its home country, while the English have found themselves in fearful confusion over a Victorian heritage of which the oratorio is the musical embodiment.

Having sung Lotti (a Gramophone Award-winning album in 2010), *Parzifal* and much in between, the Balthasar Neumann Choir is equipped for the challenges of a style painstakingly crafted outside the idioms of Baroque, Classical or Romantic eras: drawing on them all, belonging to none. The cooperation of choir and orchestra is the performance's most distinctive feature: try 'The Lord went over' with its mingled measure of words and notes. When they step out for trios and quartets, individual members of the choir sing with strikingly pure tone (matching the instruments rather more harmoniously than the main soloists), though none of them quite matches the astonishing treble of Gabriel Böer: may he make the most of it while it lasts.

Among the soloists, Genia Kühmeier most happily conforms to the sound of the ensembles. ‘Hear ye, Israel’ moves beyond the sweetness that belongs to her voice, into a mode of regretful reproach which is given further urgent intensity as the Widow, when she frames her plea to the Prophet as though her son’s illness were an offence in the sight of God. Lothar Odinius’s tenor is supple but slightly pinched, whereas Ann Hallenberg is another piece of luxury casting as the vengeful Queen.

In answer to the Widow, Michael Nagy brings more volume than leadership, with a vibrato under some pressure at the lower end of his range. His Elijah is at its best when waving threats of fire and brimstone though there is still an impotence to his threats compared with the Wotan-like Bryn Terfel for Paul Daniel (Decca, 9/97).

In other respects there are no noticeable disadvantages to making the recording live such as audience noise, instrumental slips or balances going awry. Indeed, one especially impressive feature is the discipline of the choir, and Hengelbrock’s shaping of its music, so that a chorus such as ‘Thanks be to God’ does not simply begin loud and get louder. It is – and this is meant as a compliment – the kind of performance one could imagine John Eliot Gardiner giving, did he not appear to share something of George Bernard Shaw’s contempt for Mendelssohn’s ‘despicable oratorio-mongering’. In common with other ‘period’ recordings conducted by Paul Daniel, Philippe Herreweghe and most recently Hans-Christoph Rademann, this *Elijah* has much in its favour without staking a claim as definitive. **Peter Quantrill**

## Mozart

Mass in C minor, K427

(ed Frieder Bernius & Uwe Wolff)

**Sarah Wegener** sop **Sophie Harmsen** mez **Colin**

**Balzer** ten **Felix Rathgeber** bass **Stuttgart Chamber**

**Choir; Hofkapelle Stuttgart / Frieder Bernius**

Carus (F) CARUS83 284 (56' • DDD • T/t)



Just two months after the appearance of Masaaki Suzuki’s C minor Mass, here is another that takes an interesting editorial viewpoint on the unfinished work. In this case the task of filling in the gaps has been assumed by the conductor Frieder Bernius in collaboration with the musicologist Uwe Wolff. They have not attempted to contrive the missing movements à la Robert Levin but have instead completed the movements with missing orchestrations

(‘Credo’ and ‘Et incarnatus est’) and reconsidered the sources for the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*. The general listener will hear little to discombobulate in these latter movements, while trumpets are added in the ‘Credo’ and new string parts (but not horns, *pace* Maunder and Eder) generated for the ‘Incarnatus’.

That’s the science bit; but editorial decisions go for nothing until they are performed. In a way it is a pity that this recording follows so soon after Suzuki’s, an Editor’s Choice in the December issue. Bernius takes a similarly broad approach but his choir seems reticent in comparison with the finest recordings, lacking the blazing commitment that is so evident in the best ensembles. The two solo women match well in the duet and trio of the *Gloria*, although Sarah Wegener sounds stretched by the slow tempo of the *Kyrie* and the ensemble comes unstuck rather in the ‘Laudamus te’ and the ‘Quoniam’. Wegener sustains the ‘Incarnatus’ well, however, and is finely accompanied by the woodwind soloists of the Hofkapelle Stuttgart.

The bonus is a second recording of the ‘Credo’ with the editorial additions stripped away – an exercise of a type I’ve only come across in Christoph Spering’s similarly stripped-back performance of the Requiem (Naïve, 5/02). Fascinating but, I fear, not enough to persuade me away from Suzuki. **David Threasher**

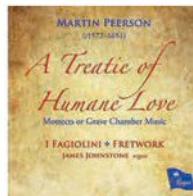
*Selected comparison:*

*Bach Collegium Japan, Suzuki (12/16) (BIS) BIS2171*

## Peerson

A Treatise of Humane Love – Mottecks or Grave Chamber Musique

**I Fagiolini; Fretwork with James Johnstone** org  
Regent (F) REGCD497 (73' • DDD • T/t)



Martin Peerson’s ‘Mottecks or Grave Chamber Musique’ (1630) contains five-part songs on poems from *Caecilia* by Sir Fulke Greville (the 1st Baron Brooke, former Chancellor of the Exchequer and lord of Warwick Castle); there is also a lament for the poet, recently murdered by an embittered servant. These ‘motets’ are not remotely liturgical: Greville’s poetry hints at eroticism and yearning but worldliness is ultimately rejected in favour of Calvinist-infused metaphors. All pieces are accompanied by viols and an organ part with figured bass – the earliest-known of its type printed in England.

All these elements are tailor-made for I Fagiolini, Fretwork and James Johnstone.

The collective consort is deftly balanced and instantly responsive to every nuance in Peerson’s emotive word-setting, and descriptive characteristics in the music are further emphasised by the singers’ use of historical English pronunciation. Fretwork’s shaded five-part viols accord pride of place to fulsome singing in this pristine recording, made at York’s National Centre for Early Music; the richest semi-independent instrumental texture is the accompaniment to the elegy ‘Where shall a sorrow’, led vividly by baritone soloist Greg Skidmore. The tripartite ‘Love, the delight of all well-thinking minds’ requires not only exquisite dissonances at its broadest moments but also conversational intimacy as the poem progresses to raise the subject of time and mortality. There is playful sarcasm in the buoyant ‘Cupid, my prettie boy, leave off thy crying’ and convivial humour in ‘Was ever man so matcht with boy?’, but darker chromatic twists of richly woven polyphony are never far away (the plangent ‘Self-pitties teares’).

**David Vickers**

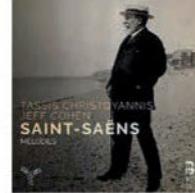
## Saint-Saëns

La cendre rouge. Mélodies persanes.

Cinq Poèmes de Ronsard. Vieilles chansons

**Tassis Christoyannis** bar **Jeff Cohen** pf

Apérat (F) AP132 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This disc signifies a dual artistic emergence. As a composer of mélodies, Saint-Saëns comes out from behind the shadow of more highly regarded contemporaries such as Gabriel Fauré, while the baritone Tassis Christoyannis steps out of the ranks of promising singers with the eloquence of a major artist. Christoyannis and his pianist Jeff Cohen have recorded several discs of lesser-known French composers, most notably Benjamin Godard. But any Saint-Saëns selection is complicated by choices – some 150 – among which the scholar of French song Frits Noske chides the composer for suppressing his own individuality (autopilot, in other words). But the songs in the four discrete collections presented here achieve moderation of taste and depth of poetic content, and in a compositional voice that evolves with the choice of verse and the period in the composer’s life.

The best song collections begin and end the disc. The 1870 *Mélodies persanes* indulge the public’s taste for exoticism, though instead of conjuring anything explicitly Persian, Saint-Saëns creates more durable

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A large poster for the London Festival of Baroque Music. The background features a gradient from blue to green. On the left, there is a portrait of a man in profile, and on the right, there is another portrait of a man in profile. The title 'BAROQUE AT THE EDGE' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center. Below it, the subtitle 'Pushing the boundaries' is followed by a dash and the date '12 – 20 May 2017'. At the bottom right, the website 'www.lfbm.org.uk' is displayed.

effects, most notably in the final song, 'Spinning (An Opium Dream)', which uses breezy but strangely eerie arpeggios to describe the vague but directionless pleasures of the drug. The 1914 *La cendre rouge* ('Red Ashes') that ends the disc sounds like a different composer. 'I don't dare call them mélodies', Saint-Saëns wrote to Fauré, 'because they're something entirely different that I can't quite define.' I agree. Vocal lines are fluent as ever, but enjoy a kind of metamorphosis that creates a through-composed effect without resorting to Wagnerism. Some songs are downright impulsive, with an unexpected but poetically apt piano interlude in the middle of a verse. The intimacy of utterance rivals Fauré. *Cinq Poèmes de Ronsard* and *Vieilles chansons* are more conventional but still show a deeply engaged composer. They also allow you to appreciate how Saint-Saëns was out on a limb with *Le cendre rouge*.

Vocally, Christoyannis is a somewhat rare bird – a recitalist who also sings Germont in *La traviata*, rather than the other way around. It's a well-focused, wonderfully dimensional baritone that one appreciates all the more compared to the occasionally unwieldy Didier Henry in his Saint-Saëns disc (Maguelone). Christoyannis's ease of expression is also flattered by comparison to the more extrovert (and sometimes tiresome) François Le Roux (Hyperion, 5/97). Whether or not Jeff Cohen is the brains behind the selection and sequencing on this Aparté disc, he's a splendid accompanist.

**David Patrick Stearns**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Le Roux, Johnson (5/97) (HYPE) CDA66856*

*Henry, Pondepeyre (MAGU) MAG111119*

## Schoenberg



Gurrelieder

**Emily Magee sop Anna Larsson contr Burkhard Fritz, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke tens Markus Marquardt bass-bar Sunnyi Melles spkr Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Chamber Choir of the Chorforum Essen; Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra / Marc Albrecht**  
**Stage director Pierre Audi**  
**Video director Misjel Vermeiren**  
**Opus Arte (P) PWP OA1227D; (F) BD OABD7215D (118' + 22' • NTSC • 16.9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DT5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)**  
**Recorded live, September 7 & 23, 2014**  
**Extra features: Documentary; Cast Gallery**



Following hot on the heels of two fine new recordings of Schoenberg's grand *fin de siècle* cantata,

this release captures something very different: the first attempt to stage the piece. It makes for fascinating viewing.

The guiding spirit is Dutch National Opera's own artistic director, Pierre Audi; one can imagine a director having a tough time persuading a house to undertake the project in any other circumstances. But Audi wisely chooses to keep his narrative loose and suggestive, emphasising the piece's affinity as much to Wagner's *Tristan* as to *Parsifal*. Christof Hetzer's designs, especially the Angel of Death-like Waldtaube, also evoke elements of Stefan Herheim's famous Bayreuth production of *Parsifal* as well as, in passing, Claus Guth's La Scala/Royal Opera *Frau ohne Schatten* – neither of which, alas, is available on DVD as yet.

The individual songs of Waldemar and Tove in the first part are straightforwardly done, but the two are seen addressing one another in a languorous, long-paragraphed dialogue rather than expressing themselves in isolation. A bed appears at the centre of the wide stage to offer a focal point, and here, as throughout, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke's Klaus Narr (dressed as a kind of albino jolly general, holding an illuminated globe aloft) and Sunnyi Melles's Weimar cabaret-esque speaker are disquieting presences.

Once Tove disappears, we are more than ever aware of the whole piece as Waldemar's own journey – dreamlike, psychologically complex and ambiguous, up to and including the final chorus, which is all the more moving for the allegorical richness it takes on. The moment he summons his army, who rise jerkily and zombie-like from the stage, is arresting, and only rarely does the direction seem to clutter things up: the arrival of an enormous fish-head – or perhaps it's the eel Klaus Narr refers to – feels like a rare mis-hit.

Burkhard Fritz, though a little stretched vocally, carries the dramatic weight admirably, running the Tristanesque gamut from ecstasy to the deepest despair and delirium. Emily Magee takes a little while to find the shimmering lyricism in her voice but is a moving, entranced and entrancing Tove. Anna Larsson, rather stiff on the recent Chandos recording (10/16), is a sternly impassioned Waldtaube here, and the character's long scene is a highlight of the staging. Melles's mercurial narrator, given a spoken prologue, is excellent. The way she and other characters appear even when not singing helps Audi to weave together his compelling vision.

The accompanying documentary focuses on the DNO chorus, with justification: they are terrific throughout. The detailed, virtuoso playing of the orchestra and Marc Albrecht's clear-sighted but impassioned conducting need fear no comparison with the best audio-only versions. A very impressive achievement all round.

**Hugo Shirley**

## Schubert



'The Schubert Song Cycles'

Winterreise, D911<sup>a</sup>. Die schöne Müllerin, D795<sup>b</sup>. Schwanengesang, D957<sup>b</sup>

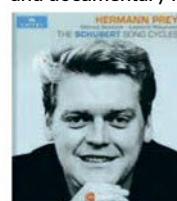
**Hermann Prey** bar

<sup>a</sup>Helmut Deutsch, <sup>b</sup>Leonard Hokanson pf

C Major Entertainment (P) BD 751304

(3h 22' + 50' • NTSC • 4:3 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DT5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded <sup>a</sup>1984, <sup>b</sup>1986. From PWP 700208 (6/10) Bonuses include introductions by Hermann Prey and documentary material



A visually rather low-grade reissue – no Blu-ray magic broom here – of three Vienna studio films made by the baritone in 1984–86, relatively late on in his career when the top of the voice could be a little less free. Yet Prey's charm and commitment to these works (in spoken introductions as well as performance) come over as infectiously as his live concerts. So it's hard to niggle, even when the setting is predictable (a 'period' drawing room with some paintings and a window) and adventurous camerawork limited to sudden close-ups of the singer at the start of the more *Sturm und Drang* songs in *Schwanengesang*.

This period-dated case of 'autres pays, autres mœurs' extends to the performances as well. Whereas even at the start of *Die schöne Müllerin* Prey's ever-present rival Fischer-Dieskau is examining the mill, its rushing water and its eponymous heroine with a viewer's detached irony, Prey himself is immediately, Romantically there as lovelorn hero and narrator. You can feel his pain as the cycle – and the girl – turn away from him. In *Schwanengesang*, like others before him (Olaf Bär, Brigitte Fassbänder), Prey has reordered the songs to create a more potent emotional narrative from this publisher-created cycle, here placing all the Rellstab lyrics last (and adding to them 'Herbst'). At speeds gentler (if memory serves) than his London performance of the 1970s, the effect is to make the work more of a tragic partner to *Winterreise*.

# GRAMOPHONE Collector

## GERMAN BAROQUE SACRED WORKS

Lindsay Kemp samples the rich and voluminous world of cantatas by Bach and his contemporaries



Manfred Cordes directs Weser-Renaissance Bremen in 'sympathetic and lucid' performances of cantatas by Sebastian Knüpfer

Even with half a dozen complete recorded cycles of Bach's church cantatas available to us these days, there is a long way to go before many people will have more than a superficial knowledge of their richness and variety. Only a handful could be considered anything like familiar, and even someone who has all 200 or so on their shelves must still be wondering where to start, which ones they haven't listened to yet, and 'which one was it I heard the other day with the lovely aria?'. For those for whom completeness is not everything, single discs of a few well-chosen cantatas may prove a more rewarding route in. There are a number of ways of doing it: cantatas for a single voice-type, perhaps, or focusing on a particular time of year.

The **Kirchheim Bach Consort**'s release on CPO concentrates on 'dialogue cantatas' in which, typically, two solo voices might represent Christ and the Soul respectively. None of them is well known but many beauties are revealed as the believer yearns for God's open arms and a peaceful afterlife: No 57 imports the plangent mood of the Passions, and the aria that opens No 32 meanders hauntingly as the soprano calls to Christ to an exquisitely played oboe solo from director Alfredo Bernardini. The excellent Hana Blažíková is moving here and elsewhere, but her sustained security of tone is not matched

by the otherwise agile and communicative bass of Dominik Wörner.

If Bach's cantatas present a daunting challenge to the completist, what then of Telemann and his more than 1000 church cantatas? It seems a fair bet that we will never see a complete recorded cycle of them, and even as we enter the 250th anniversary year of Telemann's death the most we can hope for is a few glimpses, most probably courtesy of companies like CPO who enjoy delving into the unusual. From them, indeed, comes a disc of cantatas from the 1760s, Telemann's fascinating last decade when he was open-mindedly absorbing the musical manners of younger contemporaries such as Graun, Quantz and Benda, and there are moments in the festive *Trauret, ihr Himmel* (for Easter) and *Er neigte den Himmel* (for Ascension) that might even put you in mind of Haydn. Like the cantatas on the Bach disc, there are chorales here and the subject matter is often similarly concerned with cosy anticipation of death, but Telemann's music has more of an Enlightenment feel to it, as does the brilliantly chosen coupling – an Easter cantata by his godson CPE Bach, perhaps written under the older composer's influence but showing its own personality in a warmly *galant* soprano aria and some typically restless string figuration. The performances by the Rheinische Kantorei, **Das Kleine Konzert** and a young-sounding

cast of soloists under the experienced Hermann Max are graceful, stylish and expertly done.

Though CPO does not tell us so, it is likely that some of the works on this disc are premiere recordings. **Christophorus** is more forthcoming on a new release featuring the Chamber Choir of the Erlöserkirche Bad Homburg and the **Johann Rosenmüller Ensemble** – informing us that four out the five Telemann cantatas here are appearing for the first time. These festive cantatas for Reformation Day and Michaelmas are mostly from the other end of Telemann's career, and inevitably have a more conventionally Baroque feel, if a breezy one compared to Bach. But while the subject matter often calls for trumpet-and-drum jubilance and occasional martial bluster, there is in fact more variety of texture on this disc than the CPO one, with some smaller-scale works and even one for just bass, violin and continuo (confidently sung by Hans Jörg Mammel). The other soloists and players are decent enough and are directed with assurance by Susanne Rohn, even if things are sometimes a little soft-edged. Indeed, the choir – which I take to be a well-prepared amateur outfit – struggles for weight and drive when attempting anything more demanding than a chorale.

There is no lack of splendour in another CPO disc, this time of cantatas by Sebastian Knüpfer, a predecessor of Bach as

Thomaskantor in Leipzig from 1655 until his death in 1676. His music – stylistically somewhere between Schütz and Buxtehude – is unhurried and majestic, but also lively with varied and lustrous vocal and instrumental colourings; the 26-part *Surgite populi* includes five trumpets, three cornetts, three trombones and timpani, but starts by building gradually from a bass solo. Some of Knüpf's contemporaries thought his works could be a little overlong (and actually they may have had a point), but he emerges in these sympathetic and lucid performances by **Weser-Renaissance Bremen** under Manfred Cordes as a composer of ingrained skill, aural sensitivity and elegance.

Big sounds and splendour also prevail in our final disc, a move away from Protestant Germany to Catholic Austria. Biber's *Missa Alleluja* comes from the 1690s and was composed, like most of his church music, for Salzburg Cathedral, its 36 parts destined for antiphonal disposal around the building. Unlike some of his other works for that reverberant space, it is rhythmically fairly lively – almost jazzy sometimes – and Gunar Letzbor, conducting **Ars Antiqua Austria** and the St Florian Sängerknaben, has replaced the echoey wash of some other Biber choral recordings with something more punchy. Words are vividly enunciated and phrasing vigorously clipped; and though some might find that a touch tiresome after a while, the revealed detail and colour may well be worth it. Yet Letzbor is primarily a violinist, and for me it is in the motets for solo bass, violin and continuo, *Nisi Dominus* and *Hic est panis*, that the true character of the composer of the *Mystery Sonatas* can be found – a violin not decorating the text but ardently forming its expressive world. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**JS Bach** Dialogue Cantatas  
Kirchheim Bach Consort / Bernardini  
CPO (F) CPO555 068-2



**Telemann**, **CPE Bach** Cantatas  
Das Kleine Konzert / Max  
CPO (F) CPO777 946-2



**Telemann** Cantatas  
Johann Rosenmüller Ens / Rohn  
Christophorus (F) CHR77405



**Knüpf** Cantatas  
Weser-Renaissance Bremen / Cordes  
CPO (F) CPO777 884-2



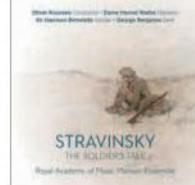
**Biber** Missa Alleluja. Motets  
*Ars Antiqua Austria* / Letzbor  
Accent (F) ACC24325

Between the simple (but not simplistic) directness of *Die schöne Müllerin* and angst-ridden look at *Schwanengesang*, *Winterreise* does not communicate so well, with less of an obvious breathing link between singer and pianist. The determined ultra-seriousness (or straightness) of Prey's reading leaves one wanting more of the acted-in emotion of, say, Fischer-Dieskau, or Ian Bostridge in David Alden's cunningly minimalist film of the cycle. Yet, *pace* his often wonderful stage acting, that's clearly foreign to Prey's delivering of the cycle (compare his Philips recording with Sawallisch). The films capture the sound of Prey's voice well. **Mike Ashman**

## Stravinsky · Birtwistle · Maxwell Davies

**Birtwistle** Chorale from a Toy Shop (two versions). Tombeau - in memoriam Igor Stravinsky **Maxwell Davies** Canon ad honorem Igor Stravinsky. Canon in memoriam Igor Stravinsky. Double Canon (Raoul Duffy in memoriam). Epitaphium für das Grabmal des Prinzen Max Egon zu Fürstenburg. Fanfare for a New Theatre. The Soldier's Tale<sup>a</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Dame Harriet Walter Narrator <sup>a</sup>Sir Harrison Birtwistle Soldier <sup>a</sup>George Benjamin Devil Royal Academy of Music Manson Ensemble / Oliver Knussen

Linn (F) CKD552 (70' • DDD)



The *Soldier's Tale* had a troubled wartime genesis from which emerged music of bite and swagger and a new kind of small-scale musical theatre. The economy of Stravinsky's writing remains astonishing, but his greatest innovation is the permanently raised eyebrow which ensures that his material, a collision of Russian folklore and popular dance, continues to sound modern. That said, even the starriest of its complete recordings have tended not to linger long in the lists. Many listeners remain allergic to narration spoken over music and prefer the instrumental suite which Stravinsky himself taped for the last time in 1961. By approving later sessions at which linking material was set down, he also made it possible for Sony Classical to fabricate a posthumous complete account, played as a one-man show by Jeremy Irons. In 1962 conductor/composer Igor Markevitch attracted an all-star cast to Vevey, including the elderly Jean Cocteau as Narrator and Peter Ustinov as the Devil, for a version in CF Ramuz's original French, albeit tweaked to include a role for the previously mute Princess and some sound effects (Philips, 9/76). In the

1980s Kent Nagano and the London Sinfonietta deployed Ian McKellen, Vanessa Redgrave (on outrageous, fiendish form) and Sting in the English translation by Michael Flanders and Kitty Black (Pangea, 4/89).

The present disc makes broadly similar presentational decisions although Harriet Walter takes on rather more narrating than McKellen, including passages allocated to the Soldier in alternative editions less faithful to the studied anti-realism of Ramuz's original concept. Textually speaking, we are pitched into the final Triumphal March of the Devil without having the downbeat conclusion spelled out as it is on the recent American-voiced rival from Jo Ann Falletta (Naxos, 5/16). That option makes *The Soldier's Tale* feel like a parable on the subject of greed for the age of Trump. The present team would seem committed to the mysterious timelessness of the entertainment and its abstractly progressive nature. The novel idea was to cast the surviving icons of Mancunian modernism in supporting roles. Sadly Peter Maxwell Davies was too ill to take part but George Benjamin stepped in as an aptly insinuating, youthful-sounding Old Nick. Harrison Birtwistle, determinedly Lancastrian, is a more reticent, deadpan Soldier.

The complementary, commemorative shorter pieces, including two Birtwistle items written expressly for the recording, are as exquisitely turned as might be expected from this source. They are almost all designedly cool. Not that there's any lack of *joie de vivre* in the main work. No complaints about the intimate, vivid sound, nor the entertaining producer's note from Jonathan Freeman-Attwood. The full-colour booklet is nicely illustrated. A pity it does not print the full text as this may differ from what you're used to. Anyone who knows Knussen's magical disc of seemingly intractable late Stravinsky (DG, 10/95) or his unbeatable *Fairy's Kiss* (DG, 11/97) will want this one too. **David Gutman**

► See our Birtwistle feature on page 16

## Szymański

In paradisum deducant te angeli.  
Lux aeterna. Misericordia. Phylakterion  
**Camerata Silesia**; members of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Katowice / Anna Szostak  
Dux (F) DUX1223 (71' • DDD)



In Britain, Paweł Szymański's name began to appear a few decades ago, seeming

to be a natural successor to such composers as Tavener and, particularly, Górecki, but to have taken such an aesthetic in a more overtly postmodernist direction. However, his interest in music of the past, and the way in which he interacts with it, was in any case perhaps closer to Schnittke in many ways. At all events, in his native Poland, and far beyond, he has continued to be a respected and innovative force, as this magnificent disc of four of his works for choir (and instruments) demonstrates.

*Lux aeterna* is the earliest piece included, dating from 1984. It is a strikingly beautiful work of ritual mourning, clearly structured and beautifully scored, making particularly effective use of bells and harps. If it ‘deconstructs’ its text, taking it far beyond its liturgical origins, it does so less than *Miserere*, from nine years later. A far longer work, it appears to begin *in medias res*, with the words ‘secundum magnam misericordiam tuum’, since the words ‘Miserere mei, Deus’ are only whispered, over a low cello drone. The music becomes progressively more embodied, as it were, suggesting elements of Baroque music, and quoting the Gregorian psalm tone. But the whispering is not done with, nor the glassy instrumental backdrop: the work’s (reluctant?) transformation into an *alternativum* setting of the text (Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek’s detailed notes provide some interesting background to the work) is gradual, halting; the effect is, in the end, very unsettling – the work finishes with cadential fragments trying to establish themselves against a seemingly unending, siren-like, upward glissando in the cellos.

*In paradisum* is from 1995 and is scored for *a cappella* men’s choir. It is a massively impressive slow burn of a piece, and extremely demanding of the ensemble (it is hard to imagine a better performance than Camerata Silesia’s here), its tension never diminishing over the course of almost 11 minutes: that tension includes the final two minutes or so over which the music sinks back down to nearly nothing – it is not for nothing that Milton’s phrase ‘darkness visible’ comes to mind.

*Phylakterion* (2011) is a tour de force in quite a different way. Scored for voices and percussion, it sets texts relating to ancient Egypt, using Greek and Coptic. Its colours, both vocal and instrumental, are evocative of the distant past, buried under sand or the layers of later civilisations. Unfortunately, I don’t feel that the work goes much beyond those colours, sounding overall like an experimental score for a radio play, in spite of some arresting moments, most particularly the extraordinarily beautiful final four minutes or so.

These are minor reservations. Camerata Silesia are a choir of tremendous versatility and subtlety, and Szymaniski’s remarkable music, displayed here in all its variety, could hardly be better served. **Ivan Moody**

## ‘French Songs’

**Caplet** Trois Fables de Jean de la Fontaine. La croix douloureuse. Nuit d’automne. ‘Quand reverrai-je, hélas...’ **Honegger** Six Poèmes de Apollinaire. Trois Poèmes de Paul Fort  
**Milhaud** Les soirées de Pétrograde  
**Ravel** Chansons madécasses  
**Simon Wallfisch bar Efrain Oscher fl**  
**Raphael Wallfisch vc Edward Rushton vc**  
**Nimbus** Ⓜ NI5938 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Multitalented Simon Wallfisch is known to many for his appearances as ‘The Singing Cellist’, though here he joins pianist Edward Rushton for a straightforward recital of French songs composed during the First World War or the following decade. *Chansons madécasses* is the most familiar work, though the principal attractions lie, perhaps, in some of the lesser-known pieces: Honegger’s beautiful settings of Apollinaire; Milhaud’s *Les soirées de Pétrograde*, with its withering portraits of Russian-Revolutionary expats in Paris; and a haunting group of Caplet’s songs, written at the front while on active service.

Not all of it is ideal. The recording was made in two instalments, in January (Milhaud, Ravel) and April (Caplet, Honegger) 2015, and one notices a pulse creeping into Wallfisch’s handsome if grainy tone at the later sessions. It proves intrusive in Caplet’s wartime songs, where the slow-moving lines really need to be steadier. ‘Aoua!’ from *Chansons madécasses*, meanwhile, lies curiously high for a baritone who has *Pelléas* in his repertory.

Yet there’s also no doubting the quality of his artistry. Dynamics are immaculately controlled, even when the pulse in the voice is not. Wallfisch has a consistently fine way with words, and Honegger’s Apollinaire settings reveal a deep, instinctive feel for French poetry. Caplet’s 1919 *La Fontaine Fables* bring out the singing-actor in him, meanwhile, his ceaseless shifts in tone creating characterisations of quite exceptional vividness. Rushton matches his verbal dexterity with colourful, insightful playing, and the pair are joined by flautist Efrain Oscher and Simon’s father Raphael for the Ravel, the outer songs of which are

as sexy as you could wish. Texts are provided; you have to download translations from [lieder.net/lieder](http://lieder.net/lieder). **Tim Ashley**

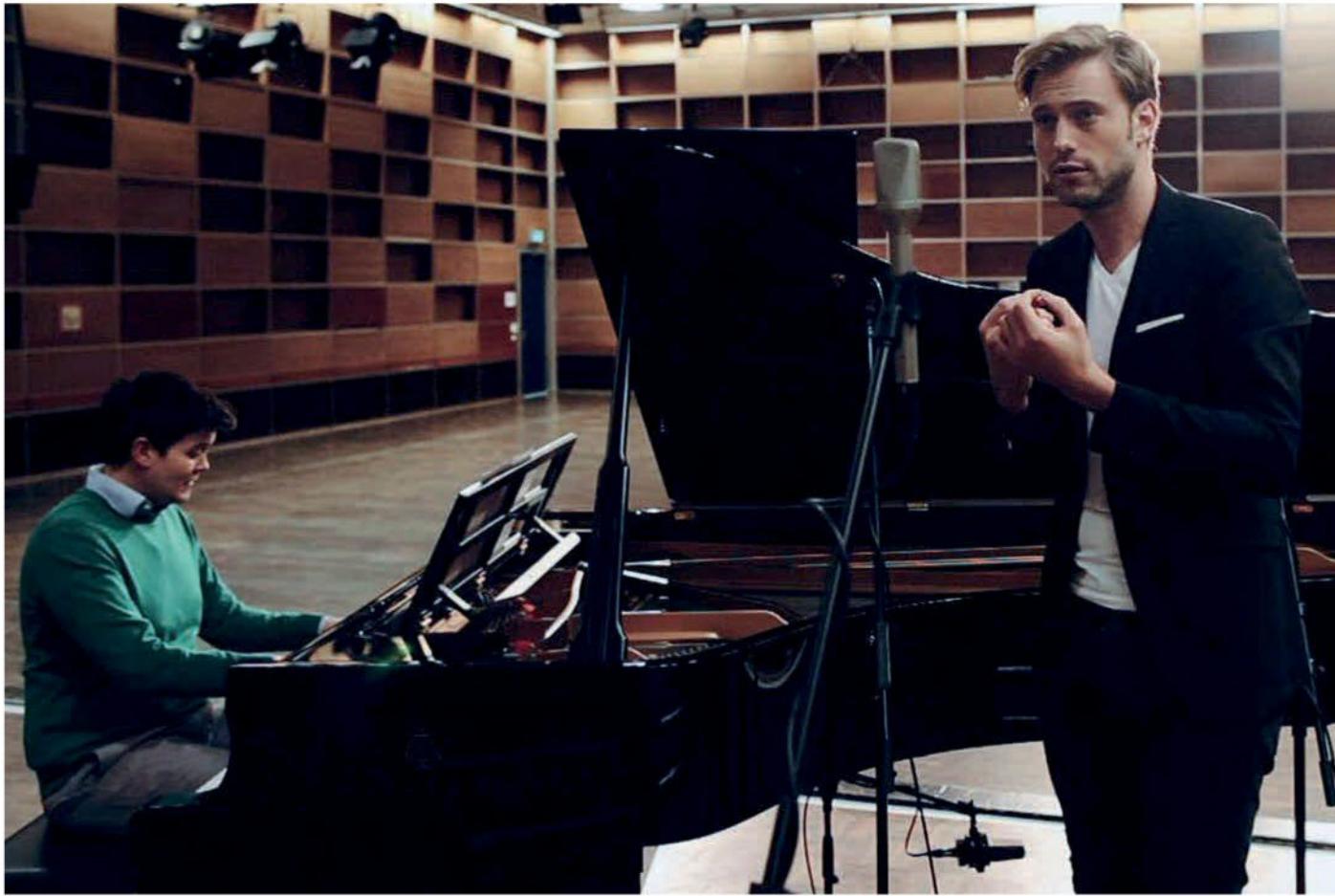
## ‘Heimat’

**Bishop** Home, sweet home **Brahms** Mein Mädel hat einen Rosenmund, WoO33 No 25.  
**Mondnacht**, Op 3 No 5. Wiegenlied, Op 49 No 4  
**Britten** Greensleeves **Grieg** An den Vaterland, Op 58 No 2. Ein Traum, Op 48 No 6  
**Ireland** If there were dreams to sell  
**Poulenc** Hyde Park **Reger** Des Kindes Gebet, Op 76 No 22 **Schreker** Waldeinsamkeit  
**Schubert** Drang in die Ferne, D770. Der Einsame, D800. Das Heimweh, D456. Nachtstück, D672. Seligkeit, D433.  
**Der Wanderer**, D489. Der Wanderer an den Mond, D870 **A Strauss** Ich weiss bestimmt, ich werd’ dich wiedersehen  
**R Strauss** Allerseelen, Op 10 No 8  
**Vaughan Williams** Silent Noon  
**Warlock** The Bachelor. My Own Country  
**Wolf** Er ist’s. Verschwiegene Liebe  
**Benjamin Appl bar James Baillieu pf**  
**Sony Classical** Ⓜ 88985 39303-2 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Anyone who enjoyed Benjamin Appl’s previous disc, a Schubert recital (Wigmore Hall Live, 7/16), will recognise the same qualities on this new album, the first fruit of a newly forged relationship with Sony Classical. The voice has a burnished, oaky beauty as well as considerable sweetness (well captured in Sony’s natural engineering), while the interpretations are suffused with a gentle intelligence, an instinct for unforced but direct communication and what feels like a real love for the repertoire. The latter characteristic is even more in evidence in this project, one which has a disarming personal element: a carefully assembled programme that explores not just the abstract concept of ‘Heimat’ but also the young baritone’s relationship with his two homelands, original and adopted.

It’s a delightful selection, split up further into evocative subheadings, which mixes songs familiar and less well known, the expected with the unexpected. Schubert, Wolf and Brahms dominate the larger, German part of the programme, beautifully performed. But we also have the disarming, twinkling simplicity of Reger’s ‘Des Kindes Gebet’, as well as Adolf Strauss’s suave ‘Ich weiss bestimmt’, presented with a gentle pathos and sophistication that quietly underlines the tragedy of its having been composed in Terezín – here,



'Charming and often moving': Benjamin Appl recording his debut disc for Sony Classical, with pianist James Baillieu

as throughout, the piano-playing of James Baillieu is superb.

Appl's move to the UK is announced in a confused whirl with Poulenc's *Hyde Park* and then a half a dozen songs in English, with a slightly more folksy tone. You'll have to go a long way to hear more enchanting accounts of Britten's 'Greensleeves', Ireland's 'If there were dreams to sell' or Bishop's 'Home, sweet home'. Appl's English, unsurprisingly, cannot be faulted. The two Grieg songs that make up the epilogue are outstanding, too. But the final moments of an otherwise near-ideal account of 'Ein Traum' highlight one reservation. The voice is very beautiful across a broad range but it remains a great deal happier up to *forte* than above it, where it loses flexibility and can develop a slightly fuzzy, even woofy quality.

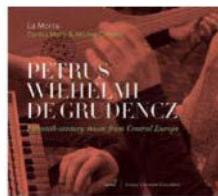
It's an issue that will hopefully be ironed out as Appl develops. As it is, though, there is more than enough quality in his singing, and pleasure to be had from his musicianship and interpretative instincts, for this charming and often moving disc to be confidently recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

► See our Benjamin Appl feature on page 20

## 'Petrus Wilhelmi de Grudencz'

**'Fifteenth-Century Music from Central Europe'**  
**Anonymous** Ave mater o Maria. Ave mater summi nati. Christus...vinctos/Chorus nove/ Christus...mala. Domine ad adiuvandum me festina. Ex trinitatis culmine. Mit ganczym willen/Der Winter. Resurgente Domino. Veni/Da gaudiorum/Veni. Virginem mire pulcritudinis **Grudencz** Kyrie: Fons bonitatis. Plaude euge theotocos. Pneuma/Veni/Paraclito/Dator. Predulcis eurus turbinis. Probleurnata enigmatum. Promitat eterno. Psalmodium exileratum. Psalterii et timpanis **Holandrinus** Virelai **Opilionis de Jawor** Rondeau Radom Alleluia. Ballade. Hystorigraphi, aciem **Tourout** O gloriosa regina mundi

**La Morra / Corina Marti, Michał Gondko**  
**Glossa** GCD922515 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Petrus Wilhelmi de Grudencz (1392-c1480) first came to light in the 1970s, when his name was discovered by the Czech musicologist Jaromír Černý in the text of the motet *Pneuma/Veni/Paraclito/Dator*. Like his contemporary

Dufay, Petrus Wilhelmi sits on the cusp of the Renaissance but, working chiefly in Central Europe, we often find him blending older Ars Nova ideas with his local musical traditions. A selection of his works is presented here alongside pieces from other Central European composers both named and unnamed. In particular, this programme is framed by two anonymous canons, the opening *Domine ad adiuvandum* and the closing *Ex trinitatis culmine*, which the group describe as 'musical gems dug out from two neglected manuscript fragmentars of (possibly) Prussian and Hungarian origin'. They are fine pieces and well worth listening out for.

There are, however, two things I find slightly dissatisfying with these performances. The first is demonstrated most obviously in *Domine ad adiuvandum me festina*. The snappy rhythmic character of the work is neither introduced nor supported by the instrumentalists, who play both first and throughout. The singers use clear, straightforward phrasing and unwavering intonation, which highlights the flaccid instrumental phrasing and air of indecisiveness that surrounds them. There are several examples of such disconnect between vocal and instrumental approaches

on this disc and it strikes me as a central requirement of polyphonic textures that a unified approach is established from the outset. In *Domine ad adiuandum me festina* the recorder's 'expressive' intonation feels at odds with the clarity and rhythmic definition of the singers, and the result is a vaguely unsettling mismatch. My second, more subjective criticism is that I find the plucked string sounds – although initially attractive, particularly in Nicolaus de Radom's Ballade and Johannes Holandrinus's Virelai – lose charm and bristle with fidgety energy when used repeatedly.

Fittingly, one of the finest performances on this disc is of the motet that first yielded Petrus Wilhelmi's name. In an all-vocal performance, Petrus's textures are rich, sonorous and rather old-fashioned for their time. *Kyrie: Fons bonitatis* shows Petrus in a more 'modern' guise and the singers at their most sumptuous. **Edward Breen**

## 'Pictures of America'

**Barber** Adagio **Bergman/Kellaway** A place that you want to call home **Berlin** There's no business like show business **Bernstein** I feel pretty. Something's coming **Ellis/Frigo/Carter** Detour Ahead **Evans** Two Lonely People **Graciene Finzi** Scénographies d'Edward Hopper **B Lane** On a clear day **T Monk** Autour de minuit **Segal/Fisher/Ellington** I keep going back to Joe's/(in my) Solitude **Sinatra/Wolf/Herron** I'm a fool to want you **Sondheim** Send in the clowns **Natalie Dessay** sop

**Paris Mozart Orchestra / Claire Ginault**

Sony Classical M ② 88985 34284-2 (93' • DDD)



Anyone who has ever seen Natalie Dessay on the stage will know what an accomplished actress she is. It is that which has put flesh on her singing and enriched her operatic career. And now a new phase begins. There is talk of films, of straight acting roles – and maybe even adventures at the opposite end of the musical theatre spectrum. Cue the American Songbook and, in this highly unusual debut disc for Sony Classical, a fascination with the painter who effectively took snapshots of the American Dream at its most enigmatic.

The entire two-disc set is inspired by Hopper: in the first he is suggested by songs, in the second composer Graciene Finzi underscores the words of poet Claude Esteban as he seeks to investigate the stories behind the images. Five different arrangers are entrusted the songs, one or two more familiar than others, the

Sondheim and Bernstein now iconic; and against an intimate yet luxuriant texture of strings – the Paris Mozart Orchestra – Dessay finds a new way of singing born of quiet conversations in private rooms, a sound she hopes will 'whisper into the listener's ear'. She is as good as her word. But a little whispering goes a long way.

The problem I have with the song performances is that the confidential tone – and indeed the colour of the arrangements – is too unvaried. Even musical theatre numbers like 'I feel pretty' and (how unlikely is this?) 'There's no business like show business' kind of purr at you through the harmonically lush gift wrapping. Actually the former, my least favourite song from *West Side Story*, is, I'll admit, made a deal more interesting by virtue of the rhythmic and harmonic subversions. It made me smile. But 'Send in the clowns', while perfect for Dessay and the ethos of this disc, has too much going on, too much 'movement', in the arrangement. The sparer the better in this number. It's just a bit rich for my blood.

Of the show songs (and Broadway aficionados should be wary), 'On a clear day' is possessed of a mystique entirely in keeping with the clairvoyant character that drives the piece – and the repetition of 'Ever more...ever more...' at the close (echoes of Mahler's *Das Lied*) gives it a haunting perspective. I also admire the way Dessay keeps it simple and avoids those jazz inflected vocal mannerisms that could so easily have found their way into her new-found style, straddling as it does a path somewhere between classical and jazz. On the other hand, a great number like 'Something's coming' (from *West Side*) goes for absolutely nothing, its restless anticipation and euphoria muted to extinction.

For me the most successful track is Bergman and Kellaway's 'A place that you want to call home', with its gorgeous, reassuring 'homey' quality. The pairing of 'I keep going back to Joe's' and '(In my) Solitude' works well, too – the wee-small-hours bluesy tone suits the presentation (rather like the Hopper that inspired the choice and which is reproduced, along with all the others, in the booklet). But – and it's a big 'but' – the overriding tone (both vocal and instrumental) is uniform, the arrangements (however lovely) drenching the songs (like too much sauce) in an all-purpose melancholia.

The Hopper 'impressions' on the other disc have Dessay speaking (in her beautiful and sexy French) the fanciful stories by poet Claude Esteban between or over Graciene Finzi's music, which in turn

behaves like filmic underscoring and is sometimes spookily redolent of Bernard Herrmann's all-strings scoring of Hitchcock's *Psycho* – especially fitting as one of the chosen paintings, *House by the Railroad*, looks like it might once have been occupied by Mrs Bates. But I cannot comprehend why Sony has not included translations of Esteban's texts. Unless you are a fluent French-speaker, the whole exercise is rendered meaningless. I for one am intrigued by the stories Esteban has fashioned around Hopper's images – but my French is too basic to give more than an impression. For sure, the sounds of the words (and Dessay's enunciation of them) are evocative in themselves – but did she really want us to go away none the wiser as to Esteban's 'detective' work?

Samuel Barber's celebrated *Adagio* (and I've heard more intense performances than this one) is offered as a musical manifestation of Hopper's self-portrait – a slightly odd pay-off to this strange and moody confection. Fans of Dessay and seekers of the unusual will want this; lovers of the American Songbook and/or Hopper's art should approach with caution. **Edward Seckerson**

## 'Sacred Duets'

**Bononcini** La conversione de Maddalena – Cor imbelli a due nemici **Caldara** La frode della castità – Si pensi alla vendetta. Santa Francesca romana – È ristoro a un cor che pena **Colonna** Salomone amante – Partite dolori; Su l'arco d'amore **D Gabrielli** San Sigismondo, re di Borgogna – Aure voi de' miei sogni **Lotti** L'umiltà coronata in Esther – Sempre fido, sempre grato **Pasquini** Sant'Agnese – Vaga rosa **Porpora** Gedeone – Quasi locuste che intorno. Il martirio di San Giovanni Nepomuceno – Della fragile mia vita. Il Verbo in carne – Lascia ch'io veda almeno **A Scarlatti** San Casimiro, re di Polonia – Al serto le rose **Torelli** Concerto grosso, Op 8 No 8  
**Nuria Rial** sop **Valer Sabadus** counterten  
**Julia Schröder** vn **Basel Chamber Orchestra**

Sony Classical E 88985 32361-2 (60' • DDD • T/t)



Aside from Carissimi's *Jephte* and the oddity that is Emilio de Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di Anima, e di Corpo*, it's hard to think of a 17th-century oratorio that is still part of the contemporary repertoire. This new release from Sony Classical might be dressed up as a star vehicle, but is really a bold and beautifully researched showcase for a repertoire badly in need of a champion.

To encounter Scarlatti's *San Casimiro, re di Polonia*, Gabrielli's *San Sigismondo, re di Borgogna* or Porpora's *Il Verbo in carne* for the first time through their duets is to enter by the back door. Duets, as Giovanni Andrea Sechi's generous booklet-notes make clear, are the exception rather than the rule in these oratorios, and it's good to have them interspersed here with arias that inevitably display greater stylistic variety and musical sophistication.

Giovanni Colonna's aria 'Su l'arco d'amore' from *Salomone amante* is all graceful, filigree melody and sensuous, dovetailing accompaniment in the violins, a starry advertisement both for Colonna's work itself and for Spanish soprano Nuria Rial, whose vocal agility and purity are as striking as ever here. She's at the fore also in Pasquini's more emotional and expansive 'Vaga rosa' (*Sant'Agnese*) and the lyrical ease of Bononcini's 'Cor imbelle' (*La conversione di Maddalena*), but it's young countertenor Valer Sabadus who gets the more athletic arias – fiery and explosive in Porpora's 'Quasi locuste che intorno' (*Gedeone*) and Caldara's glorious 'Si pensi alla vendetta' (*La frode della castità*).

In duets, Sabadus's smoky, rounded countertenor makes an effective foil for Rial's bright soprano, bringing depth and colour to the blend, while retaining his own tonal identity. If these numbers are less distinctive than the arias, then they're still attractive, gently appealing pieces, especially when enlivened by the crisp, interventionist accompaniments of the Kammerorchester Basel, led from the violin by Julia Schröder. A lovely change from the many Handel duet discs on offer. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Se con stille frequenti'

'Duetti da camera'

**Bononcini** Chi d'Amor tra le catene. Sempre piango/Sempre rido **Lotti** Ben dovrei, occhi leggiadri (*Querela amorosa*). Se con stille frequenti (*Crudeltà rimproverata*) **Lucio** Fuggi pur, o crudele **Steffani** Begl'occhi, oh Dio, non più. Ho scherzato in verità (*Testimonianza di Fede*). Ribellatevi, o pensieri

**Sara Mingardo** *contr* with **Lisa Castrignanò**, **Giorgia Cinciripi**, **Silvia Frigato** *sops* **Loriana Castellano**, **Lea Desandre**, **Lucia Napoli** *mezz* **Francesca Biliotti** *contr* **Cenacolo Musicale**

Arcana  A424 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Sara Mingardo is the headline act but features in only three out of seven chamber duets. The unifying element is the expert accompaniments of Cenacolo Musicale,

most usually a trio of theorbo, cello and harpsichord, with some occasional variety of instrumentation. Steffani wrote more than 70 duets, so three of them are the tip of the iceberg: Lea Desandre and Silvia Frigato combine sensitively in *Begl'occhi, oh Dio, non più*, an accused lover's imploration for the suspicious shepherdess Clori to stop weeping; *Ribellatevi, o pensieri* is communicated wittily by sopranos Giorgia Cinciripi and Lisa Castrignanò; there is dancelike zest in Desandre and Loriana Castellano's playful account of *Testimonianza di Fede*, even if their voices are a shade strident for such intimately scaled and subtle music.

Mingardo and Francesca Biliotti produce a striking compound of alto sonorities in Lotti's *Crudeltà rimproverata*, which smoulders with unfulfilled erotic longing as an unrequited lover bewails the hard heart of the cruel Mirtilla. Lotti's skill at creating interweaving melancholic lines is to the fore in Mingardo and Castellano's rapt performance of *Querela amorosa*. The audible epicentre of the programme is Mingardo's emotive rendition of 'Fuggi pur, o crudele', an aria over a descending four-note ostinato bass from Francesco Lucio's opera *L'Euridamante* (Venice, S Moisè, 1654). Gioele Gusberti's versatile cello takes centre stage in Bononcini's *Sempre piango/Sempre rido*; its depiction of quarrelling lovers is sung with bittersweet tenderness by Mingardo and Lucia Napoli (whose part demands several little solo arias). Bononcini's qualities are done less convincing justice by Castrignanò and Cinciripi's unsteady intonation, somewhat pinched timbres and rhythmical looseness in *Chi d'Amor tra le catene*. The revolving door of eight singers is inevitably a mixed bag, but in general these performances confirm the indubitable richness of the repertory. **David Vickers**

## 'Sing Willow'

'Shakespeare Songs'

**Bullard** Hark, hark, the lark **Chilcott** Come unto these yellow sands. Music to hear. Our revels now are ended **Hydenius** You spotted snakes with double tongue **Delp** Come away, come away, Death **Hatfield** When icicles hang by the wall **Jarman** And will he not come again?

**Leighton** Canon **MacMillan** Sonnet **Neaum** Full fathom five **Quartel** Blow, blow, thou winter wind **Ramsay** Over hill, over dale **Rutter** It was a lover and his lass. When daisies pied **Vaughan Williams** The cloud-capp'd towers. Dirge for Fidele. Over hill, over dale. The Willow Song

**Willcocks** Five Shakespeare Songs

**Les Sirènes Female Chamber Choir / Andrew Nunn**

with **Fionnuala Ward** *pf*

Albion  ALBCDO30 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Shakespeare's anniversary year may be over but still the last of the musical tributes are trickling in. 'Sing Willow' may be a late addition to the celebrations but it's an interesting one. Featuring nothing but premiere recordings, this disc from the Scottish all-female chamber choir Les Sirènes explores 20th- and 21st-century Shakespeare settings, ranging from Vaughan Williams and Leighton to David Willcocks, Bob Chilcott and John Rutter (though you'd never know it from the frustrating lack of composer details on the inlay).

The recording's claims are grand, and it should be noted that many of these 'premieres' apply solely to specific upper-voices arrangements. Nevertheless, there are some worthwhile discoveries to make here, not least *Hark, hark, the lark*, a newly commissioned cycle of eight Shakespeare settings from various composers, compiled by Bob Chilcott. Catchy and uncomplicated, aimed seemingly at the school and youth choir market, these are attractive and infinitely functional works, most with supportive piano accompaniment. Alan Bullard's unexpectedly lyrical setting of the title text is striking and Stephen Hatfield's 'When icicles hang' bursts with character, but it's Chilcott's own 'Come unto these yellow sands', with its infectious dance rhythms, and his 'Our revels now are ended' – a ballad poised just the right side of sentimentality – that are the highlights.

Two of Vaughan Williams's Shakespeare settings feature here in female-voice arrangements by Douglas Guest. The darting, flitting 'Over hill, over dale' is the more successful (though lacking propulsion and mischief in this performance), while 'The cloud-capp'd towers' wilts when stripped of the anchoring depth of its male voices. With its stark two-part writing, James MacMillan's 'Sonnet' is a welcome contrast to the disc's more fragrant numbers, a modal, medieval-inspired setting of Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, while Leighton's canonic setting of 'Under the greenwood tree' is a deliciously throwaway piece of musical brilliance.

Performances from Les Sirènes and conductor Andrew Nunn are pretty enough but lack the risk and conviction that might elevate some of these settings from functional to magical.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

# REISSUES

**Hugo Shirley** revisits a great American soprano and **Mike Ashman** on the new Met's first season

## *The 'ultimate' Price*

**R**CA Red Seal's new box of **Leontyne Price**'s 'ultimate opera recordings' covers a decade of the great soprano in her prime, from 1962 to 1972. It's probably fair to say that none of the recordings can lay claim to top-recommendation status. Two earlier Decca recordings – the 1960 *Aida* under Solti and the 1962 *Tosca* under Karajan – are arguably finer than the full-blooded RCA versions from the early '70s we have here, conducted respectively by Erich Leinsdorf and Zubin Mehta.

But there will be plenty of personal favourites, I suspect, and every recording here underlines what a glorious voice Price's was, as well as the sheer quality of her artistry: phrasing is flawless and aristocratic; there's musicianship in every line she sings, an unfussy dramatic integrity to it all and compelling *grandezza* aplenty.

Price liked to describe her voice as a 'juicy lyric'. Few would argue with that, yet it's also the epitome of the *lirico-spinto* or 'pushed lyric' – but with the emphasis always on the lyrical. In the middle and upper ranges it remains consistently beautiful and seductive, never losing its flexibility. At Juilliard, Price famously said, she learnt always to sing on the interest rather than the principal; there's always excitement and electricity, then, but one never fears for the health of the voice itself.

The smokiness of the lower range, apparently always emphasised on record, is where things get a little more contentious: it's a characteristic that sits much better with her strong-willed Carmen (with Karajan in Vienna in 1963) than her otherwise gorgeously sung Fiordiligi (on the 1967 Leinsdorf *Così*). But you will have to go a long way to hear sheer vocal luxuriousness to match that of Price's Cio-Cio-San in the 1962 Living Stereo *Butterfly*, not the first account of the role to be short on vulnerability, but surely one of the best sung (although I find the *Morte di*

*Butterfly* on her earlier 'Blue Album' even more moving than here).

The five Verdi roles dominate, and she sails through them all with the same commanding security: her *Aida* here has filled out after the earlier Decca set, with extra regal grandeur; there's no arguing with her *Trovatore* Leonore (1969), even if many will prefer to seek out earlier sets, either on RCA or live from Salzburg under Karajan; the *Forza*, *Ballo* and *Ernani* recordings (recorded in '64, '66 and '67) catch even greater youthful bloom in the voice.

But this whole box is as much a reminder of the wonderful singers that she shared the operatic firmament with as of Price herself. We witness the late career of such big beasts as Richard Tucker and Robert Merrill, and the arrival of the young Plácido Domingo and Sherrill Milnes. Tucker, on free and ringing form, is her Pinkerton and Don Alvaro, while we're lucky to have the marvellous Merrill as the *Forza* Don Carlo, Renato (*Ballo*) and Escamillo, in which capacity he is joined by Franco Corelli's stylistically approximate but vocally splendid Don José and Mirella Freni's wonderful early Micaëla – plus a noticeably more Francophone secondary cast.

Domingo and Milnes join Price for *Il trovatore* (where we also have the formidable Fiorenza Cossotto as Azucena), *Tosca*, *Aida* (with the hardly less formidable Grace Bumbry) and *Il tabarro*. All four of these are big and bold, bolstered by engineering that is rich and occasionally reverberant, but the *Tabarro* is arguably the gem, where Milnes, occasionally rather broad-brush elsewhere, offers a thrilling Michele. Domingo, a few years before his first *Otello*, is in really robust and excitingly youthful form on all four sets.

We also have the patrician Carlo Bergonzi in *Ballo* and the *Ernani* – the tenor's elegant sense of style seems to inform both sets, which are musts for any Verdian.



The *Così* (recorded in full) is the set's odd-one-out, sounding a little old-fashioned perhaps to our ears today. Leinsdorf's conducting is admittedly somewhat generalised, but the playing is very decent, and George Shirley's Ferrando, impeccably stylish and brightly engaging, is the pick of the rest of the starry cast.

A quick word on presentation. Inside the box, individual operas are packaged within sturdy sleeves featuring the original LP artwork. The booklet contains synopses, detailed tracklistings and some wonderful photos. The remasterings are excellent, and the sound (some operas featuring a small number of dubious sound effects) stands up very well. The box is not cheap by today's multi-disc reissue standards (its 22 CDs will set you back around £60), but it's a small price for such vocal riches.

**Hugo Shirley**

**C**ommemorated here in a 10-opera set (plus one CD of highlights) of reissued broadcasts, the 1966-7 first season at New York's new Metropolitan Opera began with what the press made one of the great debacles of operatic history. Admirers of Samuel Barber's music (which, remember, had included a company triumph with *Vanessa* in the 1950s) can now look for the good in the original *Antony and Cleopatra* – as do the audience clapping both the first appearance of Leontyne Price's Cleopatra and the Franco Zeffirelli sets that they like.

Unfortunately Zeffirelli (who compounded the libretto with Barber from the Shakespeare play) offered his composer too much of the grand public spectacles of the sea Battle of Actium and Cleopatra's barge (for Enobarbus's famous speech) but nothing of the intimate personal relationships he was best at (cf *Vanessa*) until Cleopatra's death in Act 3. The music so far only really establishes a strong identity for Cleopatra (one of technique with lustrous high notes) but now focuses in more quietly on the



Leontyne Price: part of the Met's dream cast for Verdi's *Aida*

sorrows of the queen and her handmaids, more telling than the generalised 'Eastern' colourings of the ensemble scenes or the brief attempts to experiment with ondes martenot and electric guitar.

After the interesting 'not-quite' of the Barber, the Met's charismatic Intendant Rudolf Bing – he can be heard on the bonus disc making a typically dry put-down of a singer on a first night backstage interview – presented nothing less than the local premiere of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* with Karl Böhm (what a work of training for him) and a dream cast from Europe. The radio engineers have obviously not yet worked out fully how to pipe in the many offstage voices, and the brass were realizing what a big evening this is. And as this is 50 years ago there are hefty cuts in Act 3. But the singers – especially then real life couple Walter Berry and Christa Ludwig (in fearless *hochdramatische* voice) as the Baraks – do make this a special event. A younger James King sounds super-fresh as the Emperor and Leonie Rysanek contributes her familiar and passionate Empress (rather too weepy in the Act 3 scene where she saves her husband from petrification).

*Otello* also has a fearsome cut in the Act 3 *concertato* but is notable for the

success of the exile returned-home James McCracken (title role) and the *pianissimos* of Montserrat Caballé's Desdemona. Tito Gobbi, a rare appearance with the company, is almost too one-coloured villainous, a Scarpia Iago. Mehta gives it plenty of heft but his sharp accents and dynamic explosions seem better suited to *Turandot*, also with cuts in Act 3's Alfano ending. The release finally makes 'official' the vocal trade-off in Act 2 of Birgit Nilsson's icy Princess and Franco Corelli's note-hugging suitor, two big voices at dramatically justified war with each other – and perhaps the most exciting couple in this opera since 1930s' Eva Turner and Giovanni Martinelli. As in all the

Italian operas in this set

there are oceans of applause here, especially after Corelli's 'Nessun dorma'. Mirella Freni is a warm unmannered Liù.

*Die Zauberflöte* is another reminder that we're 50 years back here. Lovers of old style Mozart may be in heaven with Josef Krips conducting the score as slow, romanticised Beethoven (but never as loud). The dialogues are well meant but relentlessly insecure. Roberta Peters is a pungently accurate Queen of the Night who probably preferred different tempos. Her exits are followed by the loudest thunder you've ever heard. Theodor Uppman (Britten's first Billy Budd) is a cunningly laid-back (and hence very funny) people's Papageno; George Shirley an ardent but never too Italianate Tamino wooing Judith Raskin's not dissimilar Pamina. The audience love everything to death.

No *gemütlich* Strauss for the Austrian Bing's New Years Eve audience that year but a dose of serious thrillingly executed *Lucia di Lammermoor* with a hugely on-form Joan Sutherland (the top notes absolute daggers of accuracy) supported by an ever impassioned Richard Tucker (a veteran house favourite) and livelier-than-sometimes conducting from Richard Bonynge. No glass harmonica of course, and cuts.

The *Aida* has another dream cast: Price, Grace Bumbry – whose Act 4 confrontation with Carlo Bergonzi's stylish Radamès (he attempts a *piano* ending to 'Celeste Aida') brings the house down – and Robert Merrill. Thomas Schippers (whose conducting of the Barber work was praiseworthy) is rather slow and massive here – a pity, as the others are terrific. In the other Italian works – their predominance here typical of Rudolf Bing's taste – Roberta Peters's Gilda and Nicolai Gedda's Duke give much drive to *Rigoletto* (Lamberto Gardelli accommodates his not over-rehearsed cast well). Francesco Molinari-Pradelli's conducting of *Madama Butterfly* is most unexciting, putting the dampers on what might have been a fiery love duet from Renata Scotto in the title-role and George Shirley's Pinkerton, although the ensemble generally is quite tight.

Last in the main offerings comes an intriguing early hearing of Colin Davis and Jon Vickers in *Peter Grimes* (an opera with a surprisingly long Met pedigree). Vickers, very free but convincing in his final scene, is already well into his compellingly tortured characterisation, less mannered than on his Covent Garden performances a decade later. The supporting roles (especially Geraint Evans's Balstrode) mostly go well, less so Lucine Amara's rather woolly Ellen. Ensemble between pit and stage (and the brass) starts to creak a bit as the Boar's Head party goes on in Act 3 although the big choral shouts hold together.

Additionally there is a highlights disc from nine remaining opera broadcasts which serves as much to annoy with frustration at what's missing complete as to tease. There are especially dynamite excerpts from the Berrys in the Telramunds' Act 2 duet of a Böhm *Lohengrin* and Teresa Stratas in Act 3 of *La bohème*.

A little before these performances took place an American critic wrote about the soprano Judith Raskin's voice, 'I cannot review her but I want to write her love letters'. This set should be approached in something of the same spirit with criticisms and reservations – including much intrusive stage and audience noise (transfers are effective, given the period radio originals) – being taken in the overall context of its being enjoyable, nostalgic and historically important. **Mike Ashman**

## THE RECORDINGS

### Leontyne Price: Prima Donna Assoluta

RCA Red Seal (M) (22 discs) 8898 531134-2

### The Inaugural Season: Extraordinary MET Performances 1966-67

Metropolitan Opera (M) (22 discs) 1135701822

# Opera



Richard Lawrence enjoys  
Donizetti's Roberto Devereux:

'There's enough love, jealousy and  
rage to make a gripping evening of  
high drama' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**



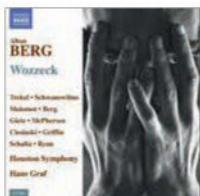
Hugo Shirley explores Hans  
Sommer's little-known Rübezahl:

'We get a nice sense of Humperdinck-like  
folksy atmosphere, and Sommer rises to the  
key moments impressively' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**

## Berg

### Wozzeck

Roman Trekel	bar.	Wozzeck
Anne Schwanewilms	sop.	Marie
Gordon Gietz	ten.	Drum Major
Robert McPherson	ten.	Andres
Marc Molomot	ten.	Captain
Nathan Berg	bass-bar	Doctor
Brenton Ryan	ten.	Idiot
Calvin Griffin	bass-bar	Apprentice I
Samuel Schultz	bar.	Apprentice II
Katherine Ciesinski	mez.	Margret
Members of Houston Grand Opera Children's Chorus; Chorus of Students and Alumni, Shepherd School of Music, Rice University; Houston Symphony Orchestra / Hans Graf		
Naxos ② 8 660390/91 (98' • DDD)		
Recorded live at Jesse H Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, Houston, March 1 & 2, 2013		



This *Wozzeck* was a retirement gift from the Houston Symphony to its

Music Director of 12 years' standing, Hans Graf. They gave a pair of concert performances with minimal staging apparatus: there is no trace here of the stage noise on recordings conducted by Abbado (DG, 2/89) and, in particular, Segerstam (Naxos, 3/02); or indeed of the audience, except insofar as the performance as recorded conveys a palpable sense of storytelling.

Graf himself acted as producer. The singers are close-miked, but so are the instrumental soloists, and the perspective only moves back a fraction for the orchestral interludes, which here serve to pull tight the threads between each scene. The extra rehearsals demanded by such an undertaking have been rewarded by one of the finest *Wozzecks* on record, orchestrally speaking: whether massed for the interludes or fragmented mid-scene, the players don't miss a trick, unless it be the last nuances of deracinated dance-metres concentrated on Act 2. The string bass sound is full and threatening where

necessary, and the fruity-toned first clarinet cuts through the scene in the pub with great style.

The most memorable vocal impression is left by Anne Schwanewilms, who brings distinct and theatrical ideas about Marie to the concert platform. While never as liberal as Isabel Strauss for Boulez in Paris, Schwanewilms makes free with Berg's notation to mark strong contrasts between *Sprechgesang* and a soaring, lyric (if by now slightly frayed) soprano to create a woman well capable of standing up for herself, neither giving nor demanding pity: to pluck out a contemporary comparison, more of a Dyer's Wife than the Empress she embodied so thrillingly for Christof Loy's Salzburg Festival production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

Schwanewilms's portrayal would be less out of scale opposite a husband more monstrous than Roman Trekel. This *Wozzeck* is more sung, and evenly so, than most rivals on record; he travels through scenes like a noble savage, roused to fearful but always musical rage by the taunting of his superiors and jealousy of his wife. Much of the opera's action takes place in the open, in public settings where the two central characters air their dirty laundry; Trekel's moody restraint is all the more effective in such scenes.

The supporting cast is strong, though Nathan Berg (the Doctor) and Katherine Ciesinski (luxury casting in the tiny role of Margret) stand out as vividly drawn, uncaricatured vocal actors. Abbado in Vienna may be irreplaceable, but Graf could hardly have left a more dedicated testament of his commitment to the opera and to his work in Houston. **Peter Quantrill**

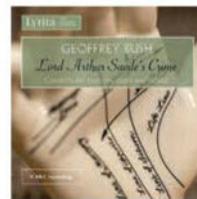
## G Bush

### Lord Arthur Savile's Crime<sup>a</sup>

David Johnson	ten	Lord Arthur Savile
Lynne Dawson	sop.	Miss Sybil Merton
Alan Watt	bar.	Septimus R Podgers
Donald Maxwell	bar	The Anarchist
Anne Pashley	sop.	Lady Windermere
Eirian James	mez.	Lady Flora
Anne Collins	contr.	Duchess of Paisley

John Winfield ten.....Lane  
Philip Riley bar.....Merriman  
Geoffrey Moses bass-bar.....Sir Thomas/Police Sergeant  
**Musicians of London / Simon Joly**

Concerto for Trumpet, Piano and Strings<sup>b</sup>  
Patrick Addinall tpt Hamish Milne pf  
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Bryden Thomson  
Lyrita ② REAM131 (74' • DDD • T)  
Broadcast performances, <sup>b</sup>May 8 & <sup>a</sup>July 27, 1986



*Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* may not be one of Oscar Wilde's masterpieces, but like his best work, the short story is ripe with theatrical possibility. And, in fact, Geoffrey Bush's one-act operatic setting (1972) was inspired by a radio dramatisation. The composer devised his own libretto, which very neatly condenses the story to three scenes and retains many of Wilde's most memorable – and scathing – aphorisms.

Musically, Bush's language is traditional and seems focused on allowing the richness of Wilde's prose to be savoured. Much of the music is written in delicately scored, sing-songy recitative, and the few *arioso* sections maintain such a low melodic profile that they're almost entirely overshadowed by the text itself. The highlights are the ingénue's Arthur Sullivan-esque aria in the first scene (a setting of a poem by one of Wilde's contemporaries), and the two orchestral interludes: the first a tense Bartókian two-part invention, the second a Bachian chorale prelude. The performance, from a 1986 BBC broadcast, sounds somewhat cautious but features lovely singing all round.

The Concerto for trumpet, piano and strings was composed in 1962 but is a reworking of a much earlier Sonata for trumpet and piano (1945). Bush's score relies heavily on the development of short motifs and often seems made up entirely of transitional passages – long harmonic



Mariella Devia is 'a miracle' as Queen Elizabeth I in Donizetti's Roberto Devereux

sequences that never quite reach fulfilment. The central Nocturne is the most satisfying of the three movements, with moments of delightful harmonic legerdemain (try, for example, from around 4'20"). Patrick Addinall's trumpet is miked a little too closely for comfort, but pianist Hamish Milne makes a strong impression and Bryden Thomson draws warm, sympathetic playing from the BBC Philharmonic strings.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Donizetti



### Roberto Devereux

**Mariella Devia** sop.....Elisabetta, Queen of England

**Stefan Pop** ten.....Roberto Devereux, Earl of Essex

**Sonia Ganassi** mez.....Sara, Duchess of Nottingham

**Mansoo Kim** bar.....Duke of Nottingham

**Claudio Ottino** bass-bar.....Sir Gaultiero Raleigh

**Alessandro Fantoni** ten.....Lord Cecil

**Matteo Armanino** bass-bar.....Page

**Loris Purpura** bar.....Servant

**Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Carlo Felice,**

**Genoa / Francesco Lanzillotta**

**Stage director** Alfonso Antonozzi

**Video director** Matteo Ricchetti

**Dynamic** ① ② CDS7755 (131' • DDD);

③ **DVD** 37755; ④ **Blu-ray** 57755 (138' • NTSC • 16.9 •

1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live, March 20 & 24, 2016



*Roberto Devereux* was the third and last of Donizetti's operas featuring Queen Elizabeth I. If no scene is quite as spine-tingling as the confrontation between the queens in *Maria Stuarda*, there's enough love, jealousy and rage to make a gripping evening of high drama. Betrayed friendship, too: the trio where Nottingham discovers that Roberto and his wife are in love is as powerful as anything in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. And the musical subtleties are a delight: that same trio begins with a fidgety phrase in the orchestra that harks back to the preceding duet; while the end of Nottingham's cavatina unexpectedly sideslips from F to A flat, regains the home key and then magically drives home his expression of friendship by repeating the phrase a semitone higher.

Monica Manganelli's set design – steps leading up to a dais, with a latticed screen – is simple but effective. Gianluca Falaschi's traditional costumes are handsome, with enormous ruffs for the chorus. The direction is straightforward, Alfonso

Antonozzi's only surprise being the introduction of a jester who sits on Elizabeth's throne during the overture and generally cavorts about thereafter. Perhaps his role is to illustrate Shakespeare's 'Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly'.

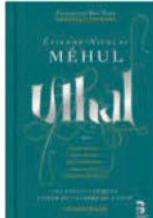
Roberto is, of course, the Earl of Essex, the queen's favourite, and the story covers his (offstage) trial for treason and his execution. So far, so historical. But we also have the apocryphal story of the ring to be returned to Elizabeth if Essex needed her help; while the historical Nottingham was no friend, being responsible for his arrest. The young Romanian tenor Stefan Pop has a brave stab at the part but he belongs to what you might call the Carlo Bergonzi school of acting: gesticulation with one hand is followed by gesticulation with the other, before both hands come together. Sadly, he lacks Bergonzi's elegance, breaking up a line that demands legato phrasing. As Nottingham (ie Charles Howard, the Lord Admiral), Mansoo Kim is not without some Bergonzi gesturing; but his accomplished baritone – warm, with a slight edge – is heard to good effect and he makes a believable, impassioned quasi-cuckold (alone in prison, Roberto asserts that Sara is angelically pure).

The ladies are superb. The opera begins with Sonia Ganassi as Sara, lyrically despairing in 'All'afflito'; later she is touchingly vulnerable when explaining to a furious Roberto how she was forced into marriage. And Mariella Devia is a miracle. Nearly 68 when this production was staged, she was the same age as the queen she was portraying. Imperious at the outset, grey-haired and witch-like at the end as she renounces the throne in favour of James VI of Scotland – an even wilder departure from history – Devia's Elizabeth is mesmerisingly well done. The chorus and orchestra under Francesco Lanzillotta are good. The CD set sounds well but no libretto is included. **Richard Lawrence**

## Méhul

<b>Uthal</b>	
<b>Karine Deshayes</b> <i>mez</i>	Malvina
<b>Yann Beuron</b> <i>ten</i>	Uthal
<b>Jean-Sébastien Bou</b> <i>bar</i>	Larmor
<b>Sébastien Droy</b> <i>ten</i>	Ullin
<b>Philippe-Nicolas Martin</b> <i>bar</i>	
	Chief of the Bards/Third Bard
<b>Reinoud Van Mechelen</b> <i>ten</i>	First Bard
<b>Artavazd Sargsyan</b> <i>ten</i>	Second Bard
<b>Jacques-Greg Belobo</b> <i>bass</i>	Fourth Bard
<b>Namur Chamber Choir; Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset</b>	

Ediciones Singulaires © ES1026 (61' • DDD • S/T/t)



Released to coincide with the bicentenary of Méhul's death, which falls this year, Christophe Rousset's splendid recording

of *Uthal* was made in tandem with performances at the Opéra Royal de Versailles in 2015. Premiered at the Opéra-Comique in 1806, the opera derives from the influential Works of Ossian, James Macpherson's supposed 'translations' of Gaelic epic poetry, the inauthenticity of which had not been definitively established at the time of composition. In France, Napoleon was one of many to express open admiration for 'l'Homère du nord', and Ossianic adaptations, both musical and in the visual arts, proliferated during the Empire.

*Uthal*, however, was a *succès d'estime* that divided opinion and eventually slipped from the repertory. Jacques Bins de Saint-Victor's occasionally awkward libretto cramps epic narrative within the conventions of French classical tragedy (complete with dialogue in alexandrines), and focuses on the figure of Malvina, her loyalties divided between her father Larmor and her husband Uthal, who has

usurped Larmor's throne. To convey the sombre, war-torn atmosphere and penumbral northern setting, Méhul omits violins from his orchestra and gives prominence to brass and high woodwind. Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques mine the resulting sonorities for all their worth, and the effect is unquestionably startling, the dark colour suggestive of flashes of metal seen through fog. The 19th-century response, however, was far from positive. Cherubini found the opera 'pretentious'. Berlioz, in a major lapse of judgement, complained of 'monotony'.

Rousset also lays due emphasis on the work's pivotal nature as well as its originality. Vocal lines that look back to Gluck alternate with brass-writing that anticipates Weber. The lurching figurations that usher Uthal on to the stage sound like Berlioz, who, whatever his qualms, also learnt much from the exquisite instrumentation of the bardic 'Hymne au sommeil', the most popular section in Méhul's lifetime.

Modern listeners are more likely to be fazed by Méhul's extensive use of dialogue for the confrontations between Uthal and Larmor, and the recognition scene for Malvina and Uthal on his arrival, disguised, in Larmor's territory. Speech and song, however, are seamlessly integrated here, maintaining both dramatic tension and consistency of characterisation throughout. Yann Beuron's Uthal and Jean-Sébastien Bou's Larmor square off implacably in their slanging matches, and Beuron's vulnerability in his scenes with his wife contrasts sharply with the gathering ferocity with which Bou denigrates him. Karine Deshayes vividly registers Malvina's oscillating emotions and the momentousness of the choice she must make between husband and father. The Bards sound beguiling in their Hymn, though it's the Chief Bard's 'Près de Balva, sur le nuage', handsomely sung by Philippe-Nicolas Martin, that emerges as the work's most beautiful passage. It's hard to imagine a better bicentenary tribute: do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

## Mondonville

### Isbé

<b>Katherine Watson</b> <i>sop</i>	Isbé
<b>Reinoud Van Mechelen</b> <i>ten</i>	Coridon
<b>Thomas Dolié</b> <i>bar</i>	Adamas
<b>Chantal Santon-Jeffery</b> <i>sop</i>	La Volupté/Charité
<b>Alain Buet</b> <i>bar</i>	Iphis/Hamadryad
<b>Blandine Folio Peres</b> <i>mez</i>	La Mode/Céphise
<b>Rachel Redmond</b> <i>sop</i>	L'Amour/Clymène
<b>Artavazd Sargsyan</b> <i>ten</i>	Tircis/Hamadryad
<b>Márton Komáromi</b> <i>ten</i>	Hamadryad
<b>Purcell Choir; Orfeo Orchestra / György Vashegyi</b>	

Glossa © GCD924001 (174' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live at Müpa, Budapest, March 6-8, 2016



György Vashegyi and his excellent Hungarian choir and orchestra follow up their two-disc set of *grands motets* by Mondonville (7/16) with the same composer's first opera. *Isbé* is a *pastorale-héroïque*: performed at the Paris Opéra on April 10, 1742, it suffered, according to Benoît Dratwicki's informative booklet-note, from being compared unfavourably to Destouches's *Isé*, revived a week earlier. The starry cast included Catherine-Nicole Le Maure, Pierre de Jélyotte, François Le Page and Marie Fel, all singers associated with the operas of Rameau.

Mondonville and Rameau were rivals, as successors to the revered Lully; both were influenced by contemporary Italian composers. *Isbé* is in the prologue and five-act format of the *tragédie-lyrique* but the lovers are united at the end and nobody dies. The Prologue, set in the Tuileries gardens, has Voluptuousness and Cupid yielding to Fashion. How this relates to the action of the opera is unclear. The shepherd Coridon loves the shepherdess Isbé: she loves him too but refuses to acknowledge the fact despite their being crowned with flowers in a ceremony organised on behalf of the druid Adamas. When Isbé's reluctance is reported to him, Adamas decides – after receiving ambiguous advice from a forest god – to offer marriage. By Act 4, Isbé has decided to confess her love, but Coridon is determined to die. Balked of his wedding, Adamas utters dire threats but immediately repents and blesses the couple. Other complications include an attempt on Coridon's virtue by Charité, and Isbé seeking and then rejecting the assistance of the sorceress Céphise.

The score consists of the usual succession of recitatives, airs, choruses and dances, with a couple of duets for the lovers. Many of the numbers are brief – the hour-long disc 1 contains 37 tracks – but where Mondonville allows himself to be expansive he writes music of real depth. Examples include the airs for Isbé that open Acts 1 and 4, and Adamas's air in Act 2. The orchestration is excellently varied: Charité and Céphise both have airs accompanied only by the upper strings, while sombre cellos elsewhere recall the bass viols of Charpentier's *La descente d'Orphée aux Enfers*. Flutes, oboes and bassoon all have



Christophe Rousset conducts Méhul's *Uthal*, 'maintaining both dramatic tension and consistency of characterisation'

moments of glory, some of them possibly attributable to necessary editorial work done by Vashegyi and others.

Katherine Watson as the rather tiresome Isbé is particularly heartfelt in 'Laisse-moi soupirer'. As Coridon, Reinoud Van Mechelen manages the high tessitura with ease, and Thomas Dolié is a superb Adamas, surely the most interesting character along with Chantal Santon-Jeffery's naughty Charité. The live recording sounds well, but for the near-inaudible harpsichord continuo.

**Richard Lawrence**

## Mozart

**Così fan tutte** - Ei parte senti!...Per pietà, ben mio, perdona; Temerari, sortite fuori di questo loco!...Come scoglio. **Don Giovanni** - Chiamo soccorso...Or sai chi l'onore; Crudele! Ah no, mio bene!...Non mi dir. **Idomeneo** - Chi mai del mio provò piacer più dolce...Idol mio; Quando avran fine ormai...Padre, germani, addio! Se il padre perdei; Solitudini amiche...Zeffieretti lusinghieri. **Le nozze di Figaro** - E Susanna non vien!...Dove sono; Porgi amor. **Die Zauberflöte** - Ach ich fühl's  
**Maria Bengtsson sop**

**Lausanne Chamber Orchestra / Bertrand de Billy**  
Dabringhaus und Grimm F MDG940 1973-6  
(67' • DDD/DSD)



The young Swedish soprano Maria Bengtsson certainly has credentials as a lyric soprano, with a series of appearances at high-profile opera houses, particularly in Vienna and Berlin. Her soprano sounds small-scale, possibly leading you to think of her as more of a Susanna than a Countess. However, it is the Countess she sings in *Figaro*. In *Der Rosenkavalier*, she sings the Marschallin rather than Sophie. This disc of Mozart arias – unimaginatively selected beyond four excerpts from *Idomeneo* – doesn't always present her in the strongest light.

Bengtsson's singing is poised and polished, but the voice becomes thin and colourless at the top and there's a sense that it's under-nourished, even when supported by the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra employing spry period manners under Bertrand de Billy. She is at her best as the lamenting Ilia, slightly breathless in recitative, and in the Countess's 'Dove sono', where she floats *pianissimos* tenderly.

Her Donna Anna lacks the necessary fire-power and Fiordiligi's 'Come scoglio' from *Così fan tutte* is a real disappointment,

demonstrating a hollow lower register and finding Bengtsson slamming on the brakes to deal with the coloratura. Her diction is good, yet there is little variation in character presented here, despite her having sung all these roles on stage. Her Pamina, for instance, spins notes effectively, but you'd have little idea of the character's torment from this performance.

MDG's booklet contains a biography and descriptions of what is happening in each scene, but there are no aria texts.

**Mark Pullinger**

## Purcell

### Dido and Aeneas

Raffaella Milanesi sop.	.....	Dido
Richard Helm bar.	.....	Aeneas
Iason Marmaras voc.	.....	Sorceress
Stefanie True sop.	.....	Belinda
Michela Antenucci sop	.....	First Witch/Sailor
Anna Bessi mez.	.....	Second Witch/Spirit

## Eccles/Finger

### The Loves of Mars and Venus (arr Bonizzoni)

**Costanzo Porta Choir; La Risonanza /**

**Fabio Bonizzoni**

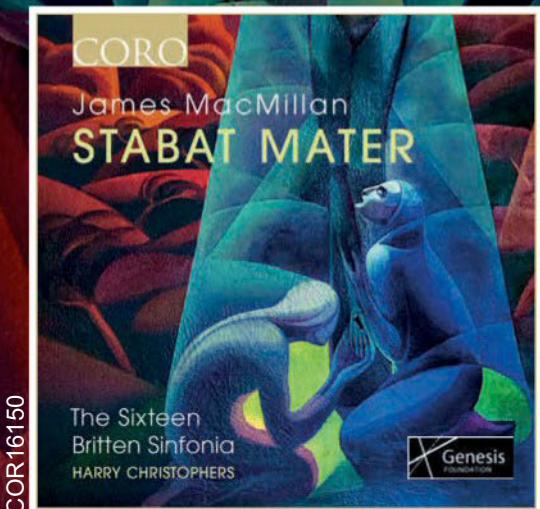
Challenge Classics F CC72737

(76' • DDD/DSD • T)

Recorded live at the Cité de la Musique et de la Danse, Soissons, France, February 25, 2016

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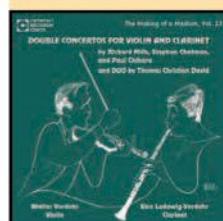
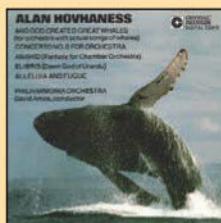


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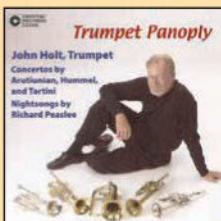
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Romberg's *The Student Prince*, recorded in concert in Cologne, conducted by doyen of musical theatre John Mauceri



From a conceptual and presentational point of view this is all rather a muddle, but at bottom is a very decent performance of Purcell's little masterpiece. The date of the first production isn't known, but it surely wasn't the 1680 of the booklet, which would make it earlier than the work on which it was modelled, Blow's *Venus and Adonis*. The first recorded public performance was in 1700; in 1704 it was coupled with a masque called *The Loves of Mars and Venus* as afterpieces to a farce, and it is that occasion that this live recording seeks in part to recreate. So the Purcell is followed by nine short numbers by John Eccles and Gottfried or Godfrey Finger. They include the published songs from the Prologue to the masque, with 'arrangements and additional compositions' by Fabio Bonizzoni. No further details are given. The track list and the libretto repeat the date of 1680, which is clearly wrong, and nonsensically give Finger's dates as 1685-1717. (These turn out to be the *floruit* dates in the 19th-century DNB, as repeated by Wikipedia.)

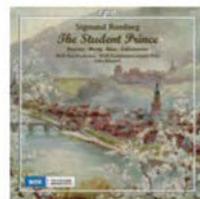
The novelty of the recording lies in the performers' attempt to recapture 'original pronunciation'. This is a risky venture with a cast composed almost entirely of singers whose native language is not English. Some of the changes are hard to detect. What's clear, though, are the 'missing rhymes'. 'Revive' matches 'give'; wounds and bears are rhymed with hounds and appears. But it's not consistent: 'command' is not rhymed with 'land', nor 'gone' with 'shun'.

Bonizzoni conducts the single strings and the continuo players of La Risonanza, plus the 13-strong Costanzo Porta choir in a lively performance. 'Fear no danger', sung by Belinda with no Second Woman, goes with a swing, as do the dances and ritornellos. 'Cupid only throws the dart' is measured and solemn; if the Witches' 'Destruction's our delight' is possibly over-shaped, the cackling that follows is definitely too much. Raffaella Milanesi and Stefanie True are more than acceptable as Dido and Belinda. I am less convinced by the men. Richard Helm's tone is not always pleasing, and Jason Marmaras's vivid Sorceress is bound to pall after a few hearings. Decent, as I say, but there's better singing to be heard on the recording under a (relatively) restrained Réne Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, 3/01). **Richard Lawrence**

## Romberg

### *The Student Prince*

Dominik Wörtig ten.....	Karl-Franz
Anja Petersen sop.....	Kathie
Frank Blees bass-bar.....	Dr Engel
Arantza Ezenarro sop.....	Gretchen
Vincent Schirrmacher ten.....	Graf Hugo-Detlef
Wieland Satter bass-bar.....	Lucas
Joan Ribalta ten.....	Von Asterberg
Theresa Nelles sop.....	Princess Margaret
Christian Sturm ten.....	Captain Tarnitz
<b>WDR Radio Chorus, Cologne; WDR Funkhaus Orchestra, Cologne / John Mauceri</b>	
CPO F ② CPO555 058-2 (94' • DDD • S)	



In its heyday, Sigmund Romberg's *The Student Prince* ruled Broadway. Its original run lasted 608 performances and during the 1920s and '30s it even outran Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* and everything by the Gershwins. Yet I suspect most people familiar with the work today came to know it through the 1954 film version with 'the singing voice of Mario Lanza'. Lanza was fired from the production but MGM retained rights to the soundtrack, which had already been recorded. If you only know *The Student*

*Prince* via the silver screen, this new CPO recording may surprise, not least because of what it doesn't contain. 'I'll walk with God', 'Beloved' and 'Summertime in Heidelberg' were all composed by Nicholas Brodszky as additional numbers for the film, so have no place here.

Dorothy Donnelly's book, based on Wilhelm Meyer-Förster's play *Old Heidelberg*, concerns Prince Karl-Franz, who heads to Heidelberg University to complete his studies. There he revels in student life and falls for Kathie, niece of the innkeeper at The Three Golden Apples. But royal duty prevents there being a happy ending in the romance stakes – by Act 3 Karl-Franz is now king and obliged to take the Princess Margaret as his bride.

Recorded in concert in Cologne, just a few hours from Heidelberg – where they still sell chocolatier Fridolin Knösel's Student Kisses – this is a spirited performance. Mauceri is a doyen of musical theatre and the potpourri overture immediately reveals that the Cologne WDR Funkhaus Orchestra has just the style required for this chocolate-coated score. A mostly German cast is assembled; and while most of their diction is comprehensible, CPO misses a trick by not including the libretto in the booklet. I couldn't help feeling I was missing out on some clever rhymes.

Dominik Wörtig's baritonal tenor – not unlike a youthful Thomas Hampson – makes for a noble Karl-Franz and he sings the famous Serenade 'Overhead the moon is beaming' with winning charm. Anja Petersen occasionally has to squeeze out the high notes as Kathie but does a sterling job. The recording includes hardly any dialogue, and Romberg keeps the tunes coming, a certain amount of recycling ensuring they become familiar as the work progresses. The supporting cast is solid.

**Mark Pullinger**

## Rossini

'Si, Si, Si, Si - Opera Arias & Duets'

**Il barbiere di Siviglia** – Una voce poco fa. **La gazza ladra** – Deh, pensa che domani... E ben, per mia memoria. **L'italiana in Algeri** – Amici, in ogni evento... Pensa alla patria; Cruda sorte!. **Matilde di Shabran** – Sazia tu fossi alfine... Ah! Perché, perché la morte. **La pietra del paragone** – Quel dirmi, oh Dio!. **Semiramide** – In si barbara sciagura. **Tancredi** – Fiero incontro!... Lasciami: non t'ascolto; Oh patria!... Di tanti palpiti. Duetto buffo di due gatti

**Marie-Nicole Lemieux** contr with **Patrizia Ciofi** sop **Julien Veronèse** bass Chorus of the Opéra National Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon; **Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon National Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola**  
Erato © 9029 59532-6 (80' • DDD • T/t)



Those with long memories may recall another disc of Rossini arias which started

with 'Cruda sorte!' from *L'italiana in Algeri*. Back in 1989 Cecilia Bartoli announced her artistry to the world with a Rossini recital (Decca, 9/89) which set standards for virtuosity that have proved hard to beat. It might as well be said straightaway that Marie-Nicole Lemieux does not equal her: for agility, for freshness of voice, for verbal wit, Bartoli wins hands down.

That does not mean, however, that this new Rossini recital is devoid of merit. Anybody who has seen Lemieux in Baroque opera will know how she can shine thanks to the combination of an imposing voice and a lively personality. Her most notable Rossini on disc so far has been Hedwige in Pappano's recording of *Guillaume Tell* (EMI/Warner, 10/11), but this recital goes much further, taking her from the light-hearted spirit of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La pietra del paragone* to two operas based on tragedies by Voltaire, *Tancredi* and *Semiramide*. As Arsace in the latter, Lemieux recalls Marilyn Horne with her commanding chest register, though she cannot match Horne's formidable clarity in the coloratura. In 'Di tanti palpiti' from *Tancredi* she fields nobility; in *Matilde di Shabran* she draws on her mezzo's natural warmth – though here, as in some of the other tracks, an uncomfortably wide vibrato has to be held at bay.

The most attractive numbers are a clutch of duets. Lemieux is paired with the dreamy, soft soprano of Patrizia Ciofi and their voices intertwine very nicely in the Norma-like consecutive thirds of *Tancredi*'s 'Lasciami: non t'ascolto'. The celebrated duet for Ninetta and Pippo from *La gazza ladra* combines pathos and fleetness of foot, spurred on by Enrique Mazzola and the Orchestre National Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon, attentive colleagues throughout. At the end, Rossini's 'Cat Duet' forms a brief encore track. Unsurprisingly, these are two cats who miaow in perfect harmony. **Richard Fairman**

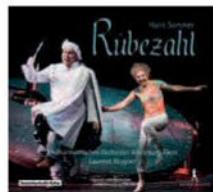
## Sommer

**Rübezah und der Sackpfeife von Neisse**

Magnus Piontek	bass.....	Rübezah
Johannes Beck	bar.....	Herr Buko
Anne Preuss	sop.....	Gertrud
Hans-Georg Priese	ten.....	Wido
Jueun Jeon	ten.....	Bernhard Kraft
Kai Wefer	bar.....	Otto Kettner
Alexander Voigt	ten.....	Hieronymus Stäblein

## Thuringia Theatre and Philharmonic Opera

**Chorus; Altenberg-Gera Philharmonic Orchestra / Laurent Wagner**  
Pan Classics M ③ PC10367 (157' • DDD • S/T)  
Recorded live at the Bühnen der Stadt Gera,  
March 31 - April 2, 2016



The folk figure of Rübezah – a kind of magic factotum, largely pro the good and anti the bad – had been the subject of a number of now little-known operas, and even one mooted by Mahler, before Hans Sommer (1837–1922) tackled the subject in this 1904 work. 'Flanked by Wagner and Strauss', says the booklet of the composer, who only turned to music after a major career in science. This phrase, however, suggests a more transitional character than one hears in this score: the work is certainly awash with Wagnerian elements, and I detected echoes of *The Flying Dutchman*, *The Ring*, *Meistersinger* and even *Parsifal*. One motif even brings the jolly Gamekeeper's music from *Rusalka* to mind: this is, after all, a folk legend that bestrides what's now the Czech-German border.

There's arguably an echo of Strauss's *Feuersnot*, too, in the waltzes that dance into the texture as Rübezah takes on the guise of the piper Ruprecht (the title is misleading in this respect, since Rübezah is the Sackpfeifer von Neisse, so far as I can tell). But it's difficult not to agree with Strauss's own assessment of the work, which he conducted in 1905. '[It] brought the decorous older gentleman much respectable success', he wrote to his parents, but 'generally speaking the music is too dry and lacks a certain inspiration.' He didn't predict it would last on the stage beyond the standard dutiful first runs, and he was right.

Still, it has its charms. We get a nice sense of Humperdinck-like folksy atmosphere, and Sommer rises to the key moments impressively. There's some colourful gothic character to the final graveyard scene, which eventually sees the demise of the evil Buko – Governor of Neisse, father of the beautiful Gertrud and imprisoner of the wise (and innocent) Bernhard. Wido, who probably counts as the opera's hero, vows revenge, but is in love with Gertrud. About halfway through, matters are taken out of his hands as Rübezah/Ruprecht himself starts to steer events.

It's a muddled plot, which Sommer's score, not especially adept at offering consistent musical characterisations, does little to help clarify. Overall it's one of



A folk legend awash with Wagnerian elements: Sommer's Rübezahl und der Sackpfeife von Neisse

those post-Wagnerian works that seems to look back rather than forwards, taking us down the fairy-tale path that would soon prove to be a dead end.

On this enterprising release from Pan Classics, Laurent Wagner's cast do what they can to bring it to life, though some are unsurprisingly stretched by Sommer's demands – Wagnerian stamina is required, but without the pay-off. The sound is decent and the orchestral playing, a few scratchy moments notwithstanding, perfectly fine.

Don't expect a masterpiece; but, as with any first recording of a long-lost work, this is a valuable addition to a dusty corner of the catalogue. Be warned, though, we have the text only in German, and the translations of the in-depth booklet essays are hardly idiomatic. **Hugo Shirley**

## 'Aida'

**Delibes** Lakmé – Bell Song **Gounod** Roméo et Juliette – Ah! Je veux vivre! **Rachmaninov** Twelve Songs, Op 21 – No 5, Lilacs; No 7, How fair this spot. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **Rimsky-Korsakov** The Golden Cockerel – Hymn to the Sun; Tsaritsa's Dance of Seduction. Sadko – Song of India. The Snow Maiden – Prologue: Snow Maiden's Aria. Enslaved by the rose, the nightingale, Op 2 No 2 **Tchaikovsky** Mazeppa – Maria's Lullaby. Serenade, Op 63 No 6 **Traditional** Alluki. Cossack Lullaby

**Soloviev-Sedoy** Midnight in Moscow  
**Aida Garifullina** sop ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra, Vienna / Cornelius Meister  
 Decca ® 478 8305 (59' • DDD • T/t)



If your name is Aida, then soprano is a pretty savvy career path. Indeed, Decca is marketing Kazan-born Aida Garifullina simply by her first name on her debut album. However, Verdi's *Aida* is definitely not part of the operatic landscape here. For someone marketed in the booklet as a lyric soprano, Garifullina tackles a lot of coloratura stuff, but does it very well.

A couple of French arias establish her coloratura credentials, including the Bell Song from *Lakmé*, which Garifullina sang, a tone down, as Lily Pons in the Florence Foster Jenkins film. She's a good deal cleaner than Anna Moffo – an early role model – and she demonstrates plenty of fizz in Juliette's *Je veux vivre*, which is giddy with excitement.

Most of the repertory here is Russian and it is undoubtedly Garifullina's strength. She is carefree and vivacious in Snegurochka's aria from Rimsky-

Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*, a role she sings in Paris this spring, and moving in the lullaby from Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa*. There's seductive charm and gilded upper notes in the chromatic arabesques of the Queen of Shemakha's 'Hymn to the Sun' from *The Golden Cockerel* – a role she learnt at Valery Gergiev's request – and, like several sopranos before her, she winningly appropriates *The Song of the Indian Merchant* from tenors.

Of the 15 numbers here, only seven are operatic arias. The rest of the programme contains songs, of which Rachmaninov's 'Lilacs' and 'How fair this spot' are particularly glorious, Garifullina revealing a gift for wistful Russian melancholy. But many are ladled with too much syrup in various orchestral arrangements. An exception to the gloom is the accompaniment to *Midnight in Moscow* which older listeners may recognise... it uses the Osipov State Russian Folk Orchestra as recorded on the 1962 Mercury disc 'Balalaika Favourites'!

**Mark Pullinger**

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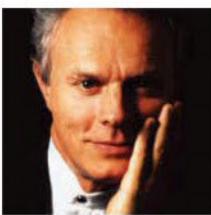
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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

# Jazz

## Pete Oxley/Nicolas Meier

**The Colours of Time: Duo and Quartet**

MGP © MGPCD019



The Oxley-Meier axis grows ever richer. Following 2015's *Chasing Tales*, the pair toured and wrote and the results are this neatly formatted double-album. One CD is a sumptuously recorded duo set which allows their sounds to entwine while keeping their own unique voices. Oxley and Meier are not an obvious combo: Oxley plays long clean lines, often with a Metheny-esque feel, while Meier's eastern flavours swerve and soar in a more heady rush. The Oxley title, 'In Restless Repose', perhaps sums up their relationship: they can create an optimistic, melodic vibe, but it's never complacent, never self-satisfied. In neat contrast, the second CD is a quartet

recording. As well as obviously widening the musical palette – bassist Mizraki lays down a startling break on 'Breeze' while drummer Cavaciuti enlivens 'Chasing Kites' – it allows the guitar chums to access a different set of emotions, less intimate perhaps, but bigger and bolder. The result is not just a guitar album to love, a jazz album to savour but a joyous album of music that reaches toward a goal beyond. **Andy Robson**

## Morten Schantz

**Godspeed**

Edition © EDN 1081



This is an important debut by Schantz on the Edition label, which is steadily making a name for itself across Europe and even raising a few eyebrows in the US. It's easy to see why with quality releases such as this. This is

exciting music, electric jazz to be sure, but of a very high level. The centrepiece of the album is 'Martial Arts', basically a three-part suite that doffs its cap to Chick Corea of the *My Spanish Heart* period, with a powerful Fender Rhodes solo and appropriate handclaps. The chains of minor thirds on 'Dill' are surprisingly not inspired by Coltrane but by Radiohead, but from whichever end of the telescope you view them, the Coltrane changes are a challenge, especially at the tempo Schantz chooses. The sound of the group is shaped by Schantz's mission to source analogue synths, which provide a much more 'authentic' roar than their contemporary digital equivalents, an important touch that, together with the almost telepathic interaction between Schantz, Marius Neset and Anton Eger, lifts this album into the realms of the exceptional (and unmissable). **Stuart Nicholson**

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**SONGLINES**

# World Music

## Rhiannon Giddens

**Freedom Highway**

Nonesuch Records © 0075597939613



The 'freedom highway' holds an iconic place in African-American folklore. It described the escape route for 19th-century slaves out of the Deep South and, 100 years after abolition, it was the title of one of the Staple Singers' most celebrated songs, written to commemorate Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery. The second solo album from the Carolina Chocolate Drops' singer and banjo player includes the Staples' classic, sung by Giddens as an impassioned duet with the American-Asian singer Bhi Bhiman – but it's merely the closing triumph to a wonderful set of mostly acoustic songs that musically and spiritually join the dots from

slavery through the Civil Rights era and on to the Black Lives Matter movement today, a heritage which she describes as 'tangled, difficult, complicated' with an equal capacity to horrify and inspire. Nine of the dozen songs are her own compositions, several of them based on slave narratives, as Giddens invests their moving oral history with vibrant new life. **Nigel Williamson**

## Warsaw Village Band

**Sun Celebration**

Jaro Music © JARO4335-2



There are incredible moments on *Sun Celebration*. 'Bridal Wreath Song' is a fusion of ancient Polish folklore, Indian drones and avant-garde European vocals, with Galicia's Mercedes Peón, Sanjay Khan

from the Dhood Gypsies of Rajasthan and the kamancheh of Iran's Kayhan Kalhor – all combining with delicate string work from the Warsaw Villagers themselves to create one of the outstanding moments of this powerful double CD. All 13 pieces draw their lyrical inspiration from Poland's oldest folkloric song material, while the music builds on Warsaw Village Band's muscular explorations of global trance fusion, drawing on the concept of solar cults that unify across India, Iran, Mediterranean and northern Europe beyond borders, eras and deities. The music is rich and varied, packed with strong textures. As global trance music, it is thick and intense, the band's signature massed vocals set around the group's jagged, evocative strings. The closing 'Towards the Sun', featuring Kalhor's kamancheh, sails you away to a land without borders, under the sun and moon. **Tim Cumming**

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# MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Two journeys – one of unusual commissions, one of protégés – launched by our cover artist

## Inspired by Slava

In 1976, for the 70th birthday of the conductor Paul Sacher, his friend Mstislav Rostropovich commissioned from 12 different composers a set of variations on a theme (entrusted to Benjamin Britten) based on the letters of Sacher's name. The list of contributors serves to illustrate Rostropovich's status among the leading musicians of the 20th century with variations by Boulez, Lutosławski, **Dutilleux** and Berio. In his 65-year career as cellist and conductor, Rostropovich contributed, through his commissions and premieres, over 100 new works to the repertoire. He made his debut at the age of 13, and it was only six years later that **Glière** dedicated his Cello Concerto to the young cellist. Later, in 1983, the Polish composer **Penderecki** also wrote his Second Cello Concerto for Rostropovich. Although the composition of **Piazzolla's** *Le Grand Tango* predicated the Penderecki by a year, it was not until 1990 that Rostropovich, its dedicatee, first performed the piece, which is a fusion of traditional tango and jazz. The Rostropovich Cello Competition, launched in 1977, was a rich source of new solo cello repertoire. **Xenakis**'s masterpiece of extended techniques, *Kottos*, was written for that first year, and **Schnittke**'s *Improvisation for Cello Solo* commissioned for the competition in 1994. *Concert à quatre*, for flute, oboe, cello, piano and orchestra was one of **Messiaen**'s last works, and he died leaving it unfinished. The Georgian **Giya Kancheli** has also expressed his gratitude for Rostropovich's championing of his music. Kancheli wrote his 1995 work *Simi* for the cellist. Later in his life Rostropovich concentrated more on conducting, and in the mid 1990s commissioned the Scottish composer **James MacMillan** to write a triptych of orchestral works (*Triduum*) for the LSO. There are two concertos, for cor anglais and for cello, and a symphony, which Rostropovich premiered in 1997. The final word in the playlist however, must go to **Rostropovich** himself, who wrote his high-spirited showpiece *Humoresque* as a birthday gift for his teacher. **Helen Cocks**

**Dutilleux** *Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher*

Mørk Erato

**Glière** *Cello Concerto* Sudzilovsky Alto

**Penderecki** *Cello Concerto No 2* Noras Elatus

**Piazzolla** *Le Grand Tango* Gaillard Aparté

**Xenakis** *Kottos* Deforce Aeon

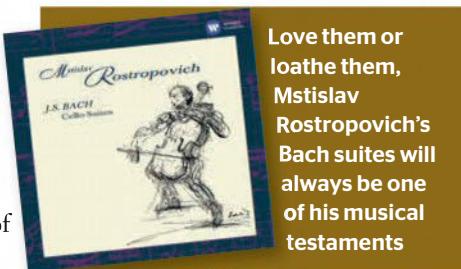
**Schnittke** *Improvisation* Schröder Thorofon

**Messiaen** *Concert à quatre* Various artists DG

**MacMillan** *Symphony 'Vigil'* Vånskä BIS

**Kancheli** *Simi* Ivashkin Chandos

**Rostropovich** *Humoresque* Geringas Es-Dur



Love them or  
loathe them,  
**Mstislav**  
**Rostropovich's**  
**Bach suites** will  
always be one  
of his musical  
testaments



Mstislav Rostropovich: a giant among cellists

## Rostropovich pupils

Mstislav Rostropovich was an inspiring and generous teacher (at both the Leningrad and Moscow conservatories, as well as in masterclasses). Perhaps closest to him in temperament is **Mischa Maisky** (b1948), whose two recordings of the Bach Cello Suites make for a fascinating comparison, the second, from 1998, the finer. **Natalia Gutman** (b1942) studied with Rostropovich in Leningrad. Her Schumann Concerto with Abbado conducting is a delight.

**David Geringas** (b1946), a Moscow pupil, has championed new music assiduously – Lepo Sumera's Cello Concerto of 1998–99 is a powerful work in the style of Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto and well worth exploring. The Swedish cellist **Frans Helmerson** (b1945), who received guidance from Rostropovich as a young man and credits him with finding 'the fifth gear': 'You had to direct 100 per cent of your attention to expression,' he said. And that potent expression can be found (occasionally barely in check) in his exciting version of

the Dvořák Concerto. **Jacqueline du Pré** (1945–87) worked with Rostropovich in Moscow in 1966, causing him to declare that she was 'the only cellist of the younger generation that could equal and overtake [his] own achievement'. Her rhapsodic recording of the Brahms cello sonatas with Daniel Barenboim had *Gramophone* describing it as 'quite extraordinarily expressive and beautiful'. **Karine Georgian** (b1944), who also recorded the Bach suites, clearly distances herself from the Russian school in her approach, offering a set of wonderful elegance and *joie de vivre*. **Ivan Monighetti** (b1948) who was Rostropovich's last pupil in Moscow, has made a speciality of music both ancient and modern and his recent recording of Gubaidulina's *Sonnengesang* is superb. **Gary Hoffman**'s (b1956) Mendelssohn sonatas demonstrate chamber musicianship of a truly collaborative nature. **Wendy Warner** (b1972), won Rostropovich's cello competition aged 18 and performed under his baton. She brings an attractively soulful approach to Barber's Concerto. **James Jolly**

**Bach** Cello Suites (1984) Maisky DG

**Bach** Cello Suites (1998) Maisky DG

**Schumann** Cello Concerto Gutman; Abbado DG

**Sumera** Cello Concerto Geringas; P Järvi BIS

**Dvořák** Cello Concerto Helmerson; N Järvi BIS

**Brahms** Sonatas Du Pré; Barenboim

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**Bach** Cello Suites Georgian Somm

**Gubaidulina** *Sonnengesang* Monighetti; Ahmann BIS

**Mendelssohn** Sonatas Hoffman; Selig La Dolce Volta

**Barber** Cello Concerto Warner; Alsop Naxos



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# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## Keyboard inspiration captured on the wing

A wonderful collection of the art and artistry of one of France's finest pianists, Yvonne Lefébure

**A**Cortot pupil who taught the likes of Dinu Lipatti, Samson François, Imogen Cooper and Janina Fialkowska, Yvonne Lefébure (1898-1986) plied a credo of musicianship before all else. Happily for us this revelatory Solstice release provides numerous alternative versions of key works, so you can gauge the mood as captured on the day. And the mood did change, very frequently, as in her Ravel, for example (she played for the composer in person), especially *Le tombeau de Couperin*, the 'Forlane' specifically. The version from January 1975 is cool, fluent and elegantly phrased, but turn to the version from January 1969 and it's very a different story, Lefébure widening her dynamic range, pulling back or pushing forwards as if making it all up as she goes along, and then way back in 1955 this freewheeling flexibility is taken a step further. The later version is fairly straightforward, the earlier ones strikingly re-creative. Comparative versions of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and the G major Concerto are similarly revealing.

In the Mozart D minor (K466), with Furtwängler in Berlin in 1954, Lefébure throws the finale's opening off with aplomb but not much character whereas with Casals in Prades in 1951 her taut, eager, well-sprung playing more recalls Haskil in her prime. The same CD also includes a darkly drawn account of the C minor, K491 with Fernand Oubradous conducting, Lefébure's grasp of the music's innate pathos obvious right from her very first entry. And there's the Schumann Concerto, full of expressive extremes under Georges Sebastian in 1964 where, although initially massive, her first statement of the principal theme is disarmingly gentle. Under Paul Paray in 1970 and Pierre Dervaux in 1955 (previously unissued) – both versions find her striking a resonant bass chord beneath the orchestra's opening – she's equally compelling but without that muscular

engagement that she appears to have formed with Sebastian and his players.

Her Beethoven had me thinking afresh about the late piano sonatas and *Diabelli Variations*. I had long ago acquired her 1955/6 EMI recordings of the Sonatas Opp 109 and 110 and *Diabelli Variations* (included here), so her penchant for nifty tempos and, in the Variations, forging ahead invariably without the support of most repeats was already familiar. The interpretative payoff is being able to follow the musical thread literally as if you're tracing it with your finger: you reach the end and you know precisely the route you've travelled. A *Diabelli* from 20 years later is marginally less intense but still eager to hold our attention whereas the highlight of Lefébure's *Hammerklavier* from 1972 is the *Adagio sostenuto* slow movement which although eschewing the expected breadth (13'49" in contrast with Kempff's mono version – and he's hardly a slouch at 15'21") turns the movement into a sort of extended operatic scena. It's remarkably beautiful. The differences between versions of Op 111 from 1959 and 1977 are more marked in the first movement than in the 'Arietta'. Violin Sonatas with Sándor Végh (Opp 12/3, 23, 30/1 and 96) reveal deep musical sympathies but also a certain frailty when it comes to Végh's tone.

Lefébure's late Schubert has an appealing directness about it. D958 opens brilliantly, the second subject refreshingly plain spoken. The finale leaps and skips energetically, the more complex middle section urgently handled. D960 is equally unfussy, the insistent chordal accompaniment to the first movement's principal theme forthright and insistent, the second movement, emotionally candid (the middle section especially compelling), the lively finale having something of Schnabel's eagerness about it. The same CD includes a performance of Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* that

occasionally betrays Cortot's influence – both in its poetry and its occasional proneness to stumble – and in the 17th section Lefébure abandons her usual lively approach and relaxes the tempo for some of the loveliest playing in the set. Other compellingly performed Schumann includes the 'posthumous variations' (two versions) divorced from their main context among the *Symphonic Variations*, Op 13, prefaced by the theme itself, as well as *Papillons*, *Kinderszenen* and the great *Fantasie*.

As to other French music, Fauré was evidently a great love: the wonderful Nocturne No 6, Op 63 (presented in two separate versions) vies with Germaine Thyssens-Valentin (Testament) for fluent delivery and depth of feeling. Further Fauré selections join works by Dukas, Debussy (the *Images* are especially fine), 20th-century pieces (including some interesting works by Lefébure's friend Maurice Emmanuel), Bach, Brahms, Chopin (including generously fanciful versions of the Barcarolle and Fourth Ballade) Liszt and so on.

I listened to this set sporadically, fitting this or that disc in between other recordings and every time I returned to Lefébure I was reminded afresh of what a wonderful artist she was, her imagination consistently alert, her technique generally up to the task of allowing it full reign. Transfers, from originals, are in the main very good, and so is the documentation. A hugely animated recorded interview is also provided. A priceless collection, which includes numerous first-releases. It'll set you back about £107.

### THE RECORDINGS



**Yvonne Lefébure**  
Une Légende du piano  
Solstice M (24 discs)  
SOCD321/44



Lefébure's wonderfully mercurial approach to musicmaking meant that no two versions sounded the same

## Violin revelations

Every now and then Melo Classic comes up with a little-known musician whose artistry quite dwarfs the majority of his or her more familiar contemporaries. Such is the Milanese violinist Wanda Luzzato (1919–2002) whose playing most reminds me, in its intellectual rigour and seductive warmth, of Adolf Busch. At the first International Violin Competition in Vienna the 13-year-old Luzzato shared Fourth Prize with the 12-year-old Ginette Neveu. Jenő Hubay, no less, thought her 'the most brilliantly gifted young Italian violinist I have heard for many a day'.

And no wonder: the 'Improvisation' from Richard Strauss's Violin Sonata is a well of tenderness, while Beethoven's Op 12 No 3 and Schumann's D minor Sonata underline parallels with Busch, the keen attack, the vibrant tone and the securely aimed use of portamento. Other works programmed are Hubay's *Sonate Romantique*, Grieg's Third Sonata, Brahms's Second and Schubert's G minor, D408. Luzzato's excellent pianist is Hans Priegnitz and in context it's worth mentioning two further recommendable Melo Classic programmes devoted, respectively, to the violinists Pina Carmirelli (MC2031, two CDs) and Guila Bustabo (MC2029).

### THE RECORDING

**Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann et al**  
Luzzato; Priegnitz  
Melo Classic M ②  
MC2026

## Wolfgang Schneiderhan: ancient and modern

Finding Luzzato's stylistic polar opposite isn't easy but Wolfgang Schneiderhan comes pretty close. Best known for his dignified interpretations of Beethoven, Schneiderhan prioritised purity and clarity of argument above the purely sensual or virtuoso aspects of violin playing. A recent Audité CD gathers together three radio recordings from the Lucerne Festival, opening with a rather febrile and heavily etched 1952 account of Mozart's Fifth Concerto under Paul Hindemith, Schneiderhan's sound unpalatably shrill, with an unvaried though insistent vibrato and very little in the way of tonal colouring. Schneiderhan's conceptually similar DG stereo version from 1968 (with the Berlin Philharmonic – recently reissued in DG's 'The Violin: 111 Legendary Recordings') is marginally subtler than this older broadcast effort. Hans Werner Henze's First Violin Concerto of 1947, a concise and eventful work that the violinist subsequently recorded commercially under the composer's direction (again for DG), receives a far more lively and responsive performance, both in terms of the actual violin playing and Ferdinand Leitner's vivid conducting. Best of all is the 1968 world premiere of Frank Martin's 11-minute Magnificat where Schneiderhan partners his wife the soprano Irmgard Seefried under the sensitive direction of Bernard Haitink, a beautiful piece that was dedicated to the couple and was later integrated into Martin's *Maria-Tryptichon*.

Variable mono sound more than passes muster throughout.

### THE RECORDING

**Mozart, Henze, Martin**  
Schneiderhan  
Audité M 95.644

## The miracle of Huberman

More familiar by far, legendary in fact, is the recording of Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata that Bronisław Huberman made with Ignace Friedman for Columbia back in 1930. Here the frisson created between Huberman's tone – always mellow but with a fiercely lacerating edge – and Friedman's wildly swirling piano playing makes for an unforgettable musical encounter. I recently gave a talk about Bartók and used this very recording to demonstrate how, at the start of the slow movement, Huberman's old-style playing contrasts markedly with Friedman's relatively modern-sounding pianism, my comparison for the occasion, the live Bartók-Szigeti *Kreutzer* from 1940 where the opposite is true. This is without doubt a great *Kreutzer* and Mark Obert-Thorn works his usual magic on the sound, which was always very good to start with. The dozen fill-ups (all of them with pianist Siegfried Schultz) are as many cameo glimpses of Huberman in a whole range of varied repertoire, at his noble best in unaccompanied Bach (music from the Second Sonata and First Partita), and Huberman's own transcription of the chorale prelude *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*, though Wihelmj's G-string version of the 'Air' from the Third Suite sounds rather turgid. A 78 of Schubert's *Ave Maria* and an abridged version of Bruch's *Kol nidre* served in its troubled day (the 1930s) as a hopeful symbol of European Judaeo-Christian reconciliation and there are charming transcriptions of Brahms, Chopin, and more Schubert, not to mention a deliciously tongue-in-cheek account of Elgar's *La capricieuse*. Huberman was a wonderful, highly principled man whose performances radiated sincerity even though, like the equally wonderful Adolf Busch, his playing style audibly hails from another age. ☺

### THE RECORDING

**Beethoven, Bach, Schubert et al**  
Huberman; Friedman et al  
Pristine Audio S PACM102

# Books



Mervyn Cooke hails a fine account of Britten's bonds with Russia:

*'Key to Britten and Shostakovich's mutual admiration was a shared ideal of composers who engage meaningfully with society'*



David Fanning on a new volume of Rimsky-Korsakov's letters:

*'We learn about Rimsky's musical tastes, his self-doubts, his encounters with the censors and his disenchantment with modern music'*

## Benjamin Britten and Russia

By Cameron Pyke

The Boydell Press, 2016, HB, 383pp, £55

ISBN 978-1-78327-113-9 (eBook £24.99)



'I had an exciting time with all the Russians', Britten gleefully told a young correspondent in September

1960 after he had been introduced to Dmitry Shostakovich and Mstislav Rostropovich at the Royal Festival Hall on the occasion of the UK premiere of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto. Britten's ensuing friendships with these internationally prominent figures, and his creative collaborations with several of their compatriots, were at the heart of an unusually rich artistic and personal relationship with the Soviet Union. His attraction to the region and its music began in the 1930s, when he absorbed influences from Russian composers into his own eclectic style; it was to peak at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, when he made several high-profile visits behind the Iron Curtain as composer and performer; and it remained vitally important to him until his death in 1976, though by this time he had grown bitterly disillusioned by the Soviet regime since its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and subsequent ostracising of Rostropovich. He had also been deeply affected by the death of Shostakovich in 1974 – at a time when he was all too painfully aware of his own mortality.

The fascinating, multi-layered story of Britten's lifelong involvement with Russia – embracing as it does questions of musical influence, cultural exchange and international politics – is brilliantly told in Cameron Pyke's authoritative and exhaustively detailed book. Pyke charts the growth of Britten's early Russophilia before devoting separate chapters to the influence on his music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Stravinsky. He then offers a penetrating and wide-ranging assessment

of the significance of Britten's five trips to the Soviet Union (which took place between 1963 and 1971), and the warmth with which the directness of his musical language was received there at a time when he felt increasingly isolated from the complex aesthetic outlook of the more experimental younger generation of composers in the West.

The clear echoes of the styles of Shostakovich and Prokofiev in works Britten composed in the 1930s – notably the Piano Concerto of 1938, with its brittle, sardonic edge – and the more fundamental influence of Stravinsky's musical thinking on his long-term musical development all came satisfyingly together in the 1956 ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas*, a large-scale homage to the Russian ballet tradition which also reflected the composer's longstanding fondness for Tchaikovsky (and which, significantly, was performed by the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad in 1973, at a time when the work had for years lain totally neglected in the UK). In discussing these and other stylistic connections, Pyke convincingly pinpoints the specific moments of likely influence with the aid of notated music examples.

Two chapters are devoted to Britten and Shostakovich, whose importance to one another developed on both musical and personal levels. Key to their mutual admiration were a shared commitment to the ideal of composers who engage meaningfully with society, their close identification as men who were both 'by instinct artists-in-isolation but by necessity figureheads for their profession', their concurrent development of strikingly ascetic compositional idioms in the mid-1960s, and their increasingly melancholic outlook on life in their final years.

For his part, Rostropovich inspired Britten to compose a series of brilliant cello works between 1961 and 1971, with the Third Suite in particular being an even more self-conscious homage to Russian music than *Pagodas* had been before it. The high point of their collaboration was the memorable premieres of Britten's Cello

Symphony in both Moscow and Leningrad in 1964. But Pyke shows how the cellist also carefully shaped and controlled Britten's perceptions and first-hand experiences of Russia throughout the course of their warm relationship. The book assesses Britten's collaborations and encounters with other notable Soviet musicians, too, including soprano Galina Vishnevskaya (for whom he composed his Russian-language Pushkin cycle *The Poet's Echo* during a holiday in Armenia in 1965), pianist Sviatoslav Richter and violinist Mark Lubotsky. Especially fascinating is Pyke's account of how Britten's music was disseminated and received in Russia, where it was championed by conductors such as Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Dzhemal Dalgal, and where it circulated in pirated editions at a time when the composer was growing increasingly frustrated by his publisher's apparent unwillingness to promote his work behind the Iron Curtain for copyright and financial reasons.

Pyke's text is distinguished by the formidable comprehensiveness of the source material he has consulted in order to assemble it, which includes Britten's diaries and correspondence, the holdings of the Britten-Pears Library (including the composer's annotated performing scores), Foreign Office and British Council files, unpublished Soviet materials and a substantial set of interviews with key participants and observers conducted specially for the project (and helpfully included as appendices). Handsomely produced and generously illustrated, the book is unlikely to be superseded in the thoroughness of its assessment of a cross-cultural relationship which the author summarises as 'a complex combination of the spontaneous and calculating on both sides', and which was important to Britten not only on a personal level: as a high-profile musical ambassador, he made an indelible contribution towards the fostering of a mutually beneficial cultural interchange at a crucial moment in the course of Anglo-Soviet relations.

**Mervyn Cooke**



Benjamin Britten (right) with Peter Pears and Mstislav Rostropovich (centre)

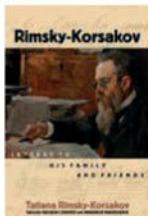
## Rimsky-Korsakov

### Letters to his Family and Friends

By Tatiana Rimsky-Korsakova

Amadeus Press, 2016, HB, 400pp, £30

ISBN 978-1-57467-454-5



An up-to-date Rimsky-Korsakov life-and-works is sorely needed. But a life as richly documented as his, and an output as sizeable, would demand several volumes and possibly several authors to do it proper justice. So an authoritative life on its own would be a start. His autobiography *My Musical Life* is an essential point of reference but, as he himself confessed, his memory was fallible and his access to correspondence patchy. *The Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakov* by engineering student turned banker and music enthusiast Vasily Yastrebstev give a valuable insider's perspective, but they only start from his first meetings with the composer in 1891, well past the halfway point in the latter's career, and the English translation is severely abridged.

The new book derives from two large volumes published in Russian and compiled by the composer's granddaughter, the first

being condensed by her for the English version down to two chapters covering Rimsky-Korsakov's youth. She draws on over 600 letters, quite a few of them to the composer rather than from him, despite the title. Among several not even to or from him, one from Balakirev to their mutual friend Semyon Kruglikov in 1883 stands out for its astute character delineation: 'At first sight [Rimsky-Korsakov] produces the impression of a very strict man. And he seems to be always ready to assure you that he is a dry old stick and hard-hearted. But it's absolutely wrong! He is very kind and, what is even more important, he is something pure.' That is indeed the abiding impression of Rimsky's own letters, which are written in straightforward, balanced and mainly positive tones, just as his music is. Not for nothing was he given the moniker 'Sincerity' at the time of his first visits to the family of Nadezhda Purgold, who was soon to become his wife and mother to their five children. But when in the next breath Balakirev declares that 'he was better before his marriage', his impression is belied by the rest of the volume, one of whose most touching aspects is the steadfast mutual devotion of husband and wife. Relations with Balakirev, by contrast, were a switchback affair, and they make fascinating reading. Eight years

on the two broke off relations. They patched things up but then fell out again, definitively, in 1902.

As a whole, the book offers some valuable supplements to other sources, particularly regarding Rimsky-Korsakov's early life, from the age of six when he accompanied his mother's parrot at the piano, through his formative encounters with Italian opera, to his composition of the First Symphony while on a two and a half-year round-the-world voyage serving in the Russian navy. Later on we learn much about his musical tastes, his self-doubts, his views on national characteristics in music, his unexpected co-option into professorship, his encounters with the censors (especially late in life), his completion of the work of others, and finally his disenchantment with pretty much all modern music and worries about his own 'obsolescence'. The late letters increasingly feature worries about Russia's political present and future.

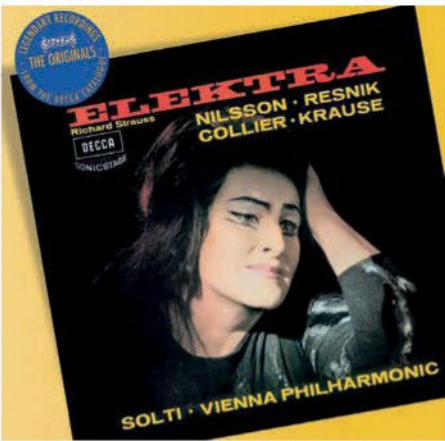
However, the book remains a frustrating read in several respects. It is clearly not intended for scholars, since it gives no indication of how one might access the original materials in order to verify the translations. Although most individuals are identified in end-notes, the main text introduces them in odd ways. Taneyev is identified simply as 'a composer', and Nikolay Tcherepnin, Maximilian Steinberg and even Rachmaninov similarly drop in more or less unannounced. While the Epilogue mentions that Rimsky-Korsakov's only son Andrey married one of the former's ex-students, it gives no indication of the important role they went on to play as composers in the vertiginous artistic world of the Soviet 1920s.

Nor is the book particularly well adapted to the non-specialist. Probably no one reading it would be unaware of the Mighty Handful and of Rimsky-Korsakov's place in it; but not until the narrative reaches 1892 – 25 years after the group had been christened – is it even mentioned. His suffering from 'multiple sclerosis' also appears in 1892. But I strongly suspect this to be a mistranslation, or at least an imprecise reference to arteriosclerosis, which is a completely different condition from the one we now know as MS. When we learn of Anton Rubinstein's death in 1894, we suddenly realise that his colossal role in Russian music, often cast as Rimsky's antipode, has gone unmentioned. And so on.

No doubt the translator and editors have done their level best. But overall, one and a half cheers is the most I can muster.

**David Fanning**

# Classics RECONSIDERED



## Richard Strauss

Elektra

Birgit Nilsson sop Elektra Tom Krause bass-bar

Orest Regina Resnik mez Klytämnestra

Marie Collier sop Chrysothemis Gerhard Stolze  
ten Aegisth Vienna State Opera Chorus;

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Georg Solti  
Decca ⑧ 475 8231

Strauss's richly detailed score is lavished with insight by Solti. The strings sound sticky and slithery as Elektra recalls the bathroom awash with her father's blood; the sacrificial procession is vividly savage.

This is an opera of ensembles; the principals can be heard playing to each other from the start when the maids gossip



**Hugo Shirley**  
and **Richard Fairman**  
on the 1967 Elektra  
from Solti and the  
Vienna Philharmonic,  
starring Birgit Nilsson



with spite, relish and neatly distinct voices. The virtuoso highpoint of Solti's reading is surely the Elektra-Klytämnestra scene; the infinitely diversified yet consistent way he brings out the shadowy, hollow, empty world of living nightmare in which Klytämnestra exists (this comes out also in Regina Resnik's fabulous impersonation of a highly complicated personality) and the extraordinary contrast at the moment when she remembers the old happy days, and the theme of the Atrides family returns

From the end of the opening scene until the end of the opera Elektra is on stage all the time. The onus of the performance falls firmly on Birgit Nilsson and she carries it as

if it were all in a day's work – though it is only recently that she took the part into her repertory, and she had, I believe, to learn several passages specially for the recording. If you consider her performance in terms of Nilsson perhaps nothing will surprise you, unless the depth of feeling in it, for we knew about her stamina, her breath-control, the glorious accuracy and ring of her top Cs, the bitterness and pride and scorn she can convey through her voice.

Tom Krause's Orest is dark-voiced and (in Isolde's phrase) 'death-devoted'. I liked the coarse, youthful Aegisth of Gerhard Stolze, and all the smaller roles.

**William S Mann (11/67)**

**Hugo Shirley** I can remember when I was first getting into Strauss – and his operas specifically – that this was *the* recording of *Elektra* to have, a definite 'classic'. Birgit Nilsson was fresh from her Brünnhilde in the Solti *Ring*, and that Decca-Vienna-Solti combination seemed unbeatable. It clearly caused a big stir when it was first released half a century ago, too, especially as it was the first uncut recording of the work.

**Richard Fairman** As always seems to happen with 'Classics Reconsidered', this is the recording I grew up with, but I haven't heard it for 30 years. I approached it with some trepidation. Would it seem too aggressive and vulgar? I suppose the answer is really yes, though Solti's dynamism certainly makes sure this doesn't sound anything like a dead studio recording.

**HS** And there's some wonderfully virtuosic work from the orchestra – the scrabbling and swirling string-writing

when Elektra remembers about the axe can hardly ever have been better played. Despite the eccentricities of John Culshaw's engineering (which we'll maybe get on to later), the sound is remarkable, too. But yes, it's all a bit brittle and driven. Generously one might call it a 'modernist' reading rather than a 'romantic' one. There's lots of scything violins, jittery wind and abrasive trumpet; Solti doesn't seem that interested in the score's moments of lyricism.

**RF** That is putting it very well – 'modernist' rather than 'romantic'. If you were listening blind, I think you would be able to hear that Solti did not come from within the German romantic tradition. It seems to me that his view of the opera works best if one thinks how strong the connection is with the original Sophocles drama. There is the same grip on the essentials that you have in Greek tragedy, the same single-minded drive towards the conclusion. No Straussian lingering for him.

**HS** It's a reading that conforms to (and confirms) the standard view of the time: that in *Elektra* Strauss teetered on the edge of the precipice, before beating a retreat a couple of years later with *Rosenkavalier*. It's telling that Elektra's encounter with Aegisth, where the score is at its most *Rosenkavalier*-like, is also where this recording feels most rushed.

**RF** It seems unlikely that Solti was consciously intending to make that point. I imagine what we are hearing is the Solti who wanted to emulate Toscanini's fearsome drive and accuracy of ensemble. Although Solti mellowed somewhat in later life, this recording captures him as still very much the fiery music director, loved or loathed, of the Royal Opera House. But here is a question for you. Do you feel that Solti's reluctance to let the opera breathe means that the characters are lacking the space they need to explore the proto-Freudian psychological depths that Hofmannsthal's libretto explores?



Birgit Nilsson: 'The steel-like steadiness of the voice seems almost superhuman, no wobble at all'

**HS** That's definitely part of it, although it's difficult to separate that aspect of the libretto from the way it's refracted through Strauss's score. That said, Solti's clarity and drive mean that we do get a sense of the restless neuroses underpinning it all. There is also plenty of humanity and tenderness in the piece, though, and I miss that from Solti and even Nilsson: tenderness doesn't come easily to her distinctly Valkyrian Elektra.

**RF** I saw Nilsson five times as Elektra and this seems to me a very fine memento of how she was in the theatre. The steel-like steadiness of the voice seems almost superhuman, no wobble at all, even if you don't feel its power as you did live. I don't remember noticing before that the intonation is a bit suspect here, as it definitely was later in her career, but the silvery lightness of her singing to Chrysothemis is very impressive. Do you still find that too cool?

**HS** It's less a matter of coolness, than a slight lack of warmth, if that makes sense. But she does manage some nice moments of vulnerability and has a greater expressive range than I remembered her having live. At full throttle she is magnificent, of course, but you're right about her intonation: in quieter passages she does wilt. And I also sense some (understandable) unfamiliarity in the restored passages.

**RF** By and large I am very happy to have the cut sections, which add a lot.

Elektra's long narrative passage describing her vision of Klytämnestra's murder would be difficult to bring off in the theatre – I don't think I've ever heard it live – but it helps build the tension splendidly to the climax of the scene.

**HS** Indeed, it's a great example of how what's not really possible in the theatre (the role's just too long uncut) can be realised on record. Which maybe brings us on to the Sonicstage recording. What do you make of the special effects, of Culshaw's attempt to create a fully theatrical audio experience?

**RF** For me, they are a major blot on the set. For all the blood and gore of *Elektra* the opera should definitely not be a Hammer-horror production. The echo chamber, the bloodcurdling groans, the screaming – they all debase it.

**HS** Nothing dates like technological innovation, and it's difficult to stomach today. But what about the rest of the cast? Both William Mann (in his original review) and Alan Blyth (in his review of the first CD release) referred, perhaps a little unkindly, to Marie Collier's 'yowling'. And Tom Krause, in retrospect, seems on paper like unusual casting as Orest.

**RF** I started out thinking Marie Collier's fast vibrato fitted quite well with Chrysothemis's nervy character, but by the end I'd had quite enough of it. Some of the later passages are quite shrill.

Krause has the authority for Orest, though I would prefer an avenging hero with a bit more charisma. That leaves Gerhard Stolze's popinjay Aegisth and Regina Resnik's overcooked Klytämnestra, who almost yodels over the break between her registers. Give me Christa Ludwig or Waltraud Meier any day. They sing the German language with such unforced meaning.

**HS** Yes, but I think the caricatured Klytämnestra, in particular, is all part of the plan: Resnik's performance is amplified (in all senses) by the engineering and ramped up by the nervy energy of Solti's conducting. We're used to far subtler portrayals now.

I'm beginning to sense that, although there's plenty that's exciting and admirable (primarily Nilsson's performance), one can now find a fuller picture of the work elsewhere, even if uncut Elektras are still thin on the ground.

**RF** After I played the Solti I took three others at random off the shelf and dipped into each. The Staatskapelle Dresden and Thielemann sounded really sluggish after Solti's energy, paradoxically almost studio-bound, even though Thielemann's is a live performance. Barenboim was better in a grand, romantic fashion, but the one I really liked was Kempe's live, 1958 recording from the Royal Opera House. That goes at quite a lick and Gerda Lammers was a terrific Elektra. Of course, it is cut, and the orchestra wasn't what it is now, and there are some places where the performance falls apart, but that is still the one I wanted to keep on listening to.

**HS** Yes, and of modern uncut alternatives, Semyon Bychkov's (Richard Lawrence's top choice in his Collection, 9/13) shows what a more considered, nuanced approach to the work can bring. If you're after sheer thrills and spills, though, I'd say Solti still takes some beating.

**RF** I was certainly glad to hear it again, firstly for Solti's drive in the drama, secondly for Nilsson's stature and the absolute security of her singing. It has to be one of the strongest recordings she left us. What I pine for, though, is Carlos Kleiber's *Elektra*, so scintillating in the theatre and still electrifying in my memory, but unfortunately only preserved on a very dim bootleg recording. I think I'll just close my eyes and dream on. **G**

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## *Historical female composers*

**Alexandra Coghlan** urges us to talk less and listen more when it comes to considering historical female composers, and in her disc selection she avoids the giants, highlighting instead some lesser-known figures

This month, on International Women's Day, the classical spotlight will once again be turned full beam on female composers, both living and historical. As an industry we spend a

lot of time talking about female composers of the past – about the difficulties they faced, the problem they represent, the challenging lives they led and the societal norms that account for their marginal place

in the classical canon – but far less time actually listening to their music.

These are conversations absolutely worth having, but they also risk obscuring the very artists they wish to champion, reducing individual creative artists into a generalised political argument. It's only by returning to the scores themselves, by programming, performing, recording and listening to this music, that its creators can hope to attain today some of the status so consistently denied them during their lifetimes.

It sounds like a simple formula: talk less, listen more; but there's a reason that such a situation has evolved. In far too many cases there simply aren't the scores or recordings available. It's a problem that starts in a world that saw Francesco Cavalli able to pay to create and preserve a library of his manuscripts while his equally successful contemporary Barbara Strozzi was not. And its legacy still persists today; Radio 3's *Composer of the Week* team have publicly expressed their frustration at repeatedly finding potential female subjects only to discover that there just isn't enough recorded repertoire available.

There are women omitted here – Marianna Martines, Caterina Assandra, Augusta Holmès, to name just a few – whose lack of contemporary discography disqualifies them from contention, and still more, Florence Price chief among them, whose recorded footprint is still disproportionately, awkwardly small. And so, too often, the conversation about women defaults to just a few stars – Hildegard of Bingen, Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger – whose comparatively strong place in the catalogue forces them to speak for all their silent colleagues. My choices here avoid these giants, giving space instead to composers with less of a foothold in the repertoire. **G**



'The Viola da Gamba Player' (c1630-40), by Bernardo Strozzi, is believed to be a portrait of Barbara Strozzi

**Kassia**

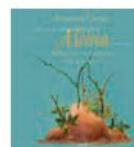
'Byzantine Hymns of the First Female Composer'  
VocaMe / Michael Popp  
Christophorus

Instead of starting with Hildegard, histories of female music should begin three centuries earlier with ninth-century Constantinople abbess Kassia, best known for her *stichera* (Orthodox Church hymns). Here we can hear some of these on disc for the first time. Syllabic word-setting and short phrases generate works of high drama, including monophonic hymns, early organum and melodies with drone accompaniment, all sympathetically recorded by all-female vocal group VocaMe.

**Price****Orchestral works**

Karen Walwyn pf New Black Music Repertory Ensemble /  
Leslie B Dunner Albany

Florence Price (b 1887) was the first African American woman to have her work played by a major US orchestra. She fought prejudice to become a distinctive voice in US musical nationalism in the 1930s and '40s, blending contemporary classical textures and techniques with rhythms and melodies of black America. Most of her music is unpublished, so recordings are few, but this one gives a good sense of her generous musical personality and skill.

**F Caccini**

*La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina*  
Soloists, Alabastrina,  
La Pifarescha / Elena Sartori  
Glossa

The earliest known opera by a woman, Francesca Caccini's work gives the Alcina episode from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* a quietly feminist treatment. The result is witty and musically deft, comprising through-composed recitative, stand-alone *canzonettas* and ensembles. Elena Biscuola is a seductive and mature Alcina working her wiles on Mauro Borgioni's forthright Ruggiero. This recent, fine recording is something to celebrate.

**Lutyens**

**Choral and chamber works**  
Exaudi / James Weeks;  
Endymion  
NMC (12/06)

Meticulously programmed by Bayan Northcott, this disc of Elisabeth Lutyens's strongest small-scale works from the height of her creativity (1950s and '60s) has plenty to marvel at (not least in the impeccable performances) but also a surprising amount to love. Texturally austere and technically awesome, the choral works showcase the harmonic richness of her writing, and the chamber pieces display the textural clarity and wiry energy that define this uncompromising modernist.

**Hensel**

**String Quartet**  
Ebène Quartet  
Virgin (A/13)

France's Ebène Quartet put the elephant in the room front and centre on this release that pairs string quartets by Felix Mendelssohn with the one written by his sister Fanny Hensel. The result is less musical competition than it is conversation, with Hensel holding her own against the more extrovert dramatics of her brother. In the hands of this young quartet, her music emerges with tremendous tenderness (*Romanze*) but also gleeful brilliance (*Allegro molto vivace*).

**Tailleferre**

**Chamber music for strings, winds and piano**  
Fanny Mendelssohn Qt, et al  
Troubadisc

Germaine Tailleferre, lone female member of Les Six, tends to get overshadowed by Poulenc and Honegger, but there's a gentle invention in her music, and bags of charm. Melody flows instinctively through works that change little in style through her long career: it tempers the biting wit of *Image* for chamber ensemble, and comes to the fore in the beguiling and concise String Quartet. This disc is a perfect musical introduction, with consistently clean and incisive playing.

**Cozzolani**

**I vespri natalizi**  
Cappella Artemisia /  
Candace Smith  
Tactus

One of many wealthy women to take the veil in 17th-century Milan, Chiara Margarita Cozzolani was also one of many to turn to composition. During her lifetime, she was considered one of Milan's leading composers, her prolific output dominated by sacred vocal works. Her Christmas Vespers is especially joyful, alternating rich choruses with florid solos and duets. This premiere recording captures its exhilarating energy, if not always its full vocal drama.

**Clarke**

**Piano Trio**  
Lincoln Trio  
Cedille (12/16)

It's easy to hear why this album, 'Trios from Our Homelands', which sets Rebecca Clarke's Piano Trio against those by Frank Martin and Arno Babajanian, has been nominated for a 2017 Grammy. There's a fire and urgency to these performances that pleads eloquently for this little-known repertoire. The Clarke is the standout, however, with its complex set of recurring themes, a slow movement of startling, passionate beauty, and harmonic language that, at its extremes, reaches towards Scriabin.

**Farrenc**

**Trios - Op 33 and Op 44.  
Sextet**  
Linos Ensemble  
CPO

Louise Farrenc was a 19th-century scholar, historian and composer and the first female to hold an important chair at the Paris Conservatoire. Her significance goes well beyond her own music, yet the music alone would be enough to ensure her place in history. Though she was most prolific as a composer for solo piano, her chamber music sees her at her best. This disc captures both the classical poise and the sensuous, proto-Romantic mood of her writing.

**Strozzi**

**Arias** Raquel Andueza sop Jesús Fernández Baena theorbo  
NB

The prolific 17th-century composer Barbara Strozzi is well served on recordings, so why choose an album containing just four of her arias (alongside works by Monteverdi, Merula, Landi, Cazzati, Kapsberger and others), making up only around half an hour of music? One reason is the fact that it features Spanish soprano Raquel Andueza. Andueza has

a wonderfully earthy, folksy approach to this music which cuts to the strikingly contemporary heart of Strozzi's extraordinary secular songs, full of romantic yearning, pain and anger. The selection here may be small, but it is also telling, including the exquisite 'Che si può fare' and the quasi-operatic 'L'Eraclito amoroso'.

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Varèse's Ameriques

This epic, audaciously futuristic orchestral piece is rarely performed, and its equally sparse recording history began only after Varèse's death. **Philip Clark** assesses available recordings of its two versions

Edgard Varèse's *Ameriques* rejoices in the power it holds to rearrange the chemistry of your brain. The music's snarling physical presence has you genuinely believing that its organised sounds are a procreating, living and breathing, growing and ageing entity. It's *Ameriques* that is all ears – and *you* become a complex of motifs and structures, a score shaped and interpreted by proximity to Varèse's sounds.

Two authorised published editions exist: *Amériques* (1922) and *Ameriques* (1929). The earlier version is scored for an unconscionably vast orchestra, with three piccolos at the top of the spectrum balanced by two contrabassoons and a pair of contrabass tubas down below, a percussion section that incorporates whistles and sirens, and an off-stage brass band that lends the music telescoping geographical perspective. In the 1929 version, as part of a general trimming of orchestral excess, gone is the off-stage brass – gone, too, the acute accent in the title. Having recently completed his follow-up orchestral piece *Arcana*, Varèse gave *Amériques*'s orchestration and structure a radical overhaul, fuelled by a newly acquired confidence and facility for making orchestras dance to his tune.

In between the composition of *Amériques* and *Ameriques*, New York City would evolve into the super-metropolis that we now imagine Varèse's music to be depicting. Construction of the Chrysler Building began in 1928, with the Empire State Building following two years later, and creative beings were grappling with the emotional and psychological consequences of this urban spread. The painters Christopher Nevinson

(*The Soul of the Soulless City*, 1920) and Louis Lozowick (*New York*, 1925) invoked images of queasy dystopia, and in his 1925 novel *Manhattan Transfer*, John Dos Passos characterised the sounds, rhythms and smells of New York City every bit as meticulously as he did the characters whose lives thread through his post-Joycean mosaic.

Varèse and Dos Passos capture a city of glimpses and sudden disappearances, a sensory phenomenon still recognisably part of today's New York experience. Iconic images you *think* you know – like the Empire State Building or Flatiron Building – are in reality endlessly filtered and abstracted, their angular shapes framed by the neighbouring skyscrapers, the geometry rotating as you turn a street corner, opening vistas onto radically altered perspectives. Light is refracted in all directions by New York's towers of glass, like overtones radiating from a sustained hum. And Varèse's piece continually turns corners – full 90-degree about-turns – to reveal unseen angles on familiar harmonic landmarks.

But Varèse's piece might not be an urbanistic showpiece after all. 'I did not think of the title *Amériques* as purely geographic but as symbolic of discoveries – new worlds on earth, in the sky, or in the minds of men,' Varèse would say, reflecting the ambition of his original working title *Amériques: Americas, New Worlds*.

Skyscrapers and railways epitomise the dynamism of a modern metropolis in *The Soul of the Soulless City ('New York - an Abstraction')*, a painting by Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889-1946)



With the exception of his trademark siren (because no Varèse orchestral piece would be complete without it), his rewrite cut those sonic *objets trouvés* he had scavenged from the sidewalks in an attempt to downplay postcard impressionism – those steamboat whistles described so precisely by Dos Passos are silenced in Varèse's revision. And wise interpreters need to keep Varèse's revisionism in mind and strike a balance between stark geography and visionary mysticism.

Mirroring the opening bars of Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* and Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, a lone woodwind voice summons this soundscape into being. Varèse's unaccompanied alto flute warms the base alchemy of harmony itself as a falling seventh orients itself around loops of perfect fifths and perfect fourths. A rising three-note chromatic figure two bars later in the first bassoon could have been copied and pasted from Stravinsky's 1913 ballet score, and notice is duly given of how deeply *Le sacre* is embedded inside this piece's gestural and harmonic DNA. Stravinsky's piece had been the future once, too, and became the hinge around which Varèse's roots as an expat Frenchman and this New World symphony turned. But whereas Stravinsky plundered the past to imagine a present, Varèse's grids of melody and panoramic harmonic markers were apparently too curious about this new world to settle inside obedient structural patterns. Varèse consciously ventriloquised a vision of the future out of all the material surrounding him.

Classical music lovers were, predictably enough, scandalised when Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra premiered *Amériques* on April 9, 1926. But persuading this cult conductor to perform this unwieldy composition represented a triumph in itself. Not that Varèse found that hustling came naturally. He had initially made overtures towards Stokowski in 1922, but heard nothing. To a friend in 1924 he wrote: 'Stokowski, the swine, hasn't answered my letter.'

#### 1922 OR 1929 – WHICH VERSION?

Most conductors opt to record Varèse's revised version. The 1929 score, the logic goes, documents his final thoughts on the piece while offering a more practical performance edition. But Riccardo Chailly, Christopher Lyndon-Gee, Mariss Jansons and Ingo Metzmacher have all begged to differ, and Varèse's initial view of his piece is the appropriate place with which to begin this survey.

**Christopher Lyndon-Gee** and the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra's



PHOTOGRAPH: © THE SOUL OF THE SOULLESS CITY (NEW YORK - AN ABSTRACTION) 1920 - CHRISTOPHER RICHARD WYNNE NEVINSON 1889-1946 © TATE, LONDON, 2017



With the Cleveland Orchestra, Christoph von Dohnányi gives a balanced reading of Varèse's score

2005 version is perfectly serviceable and intrepidly noisy, but also reveals something of what *not* to do. Situating the off-stage brass so far in the middle distance that any functioning sense of perspective becomes compromised – it sounds like Varèse's brass ensemble has been marooned on the other side of the Hudson River – is a clumsy miscalculation. The PNRSO smoker's-cough brass and squawky woodwind might work in early Penderecki or Górecki, but Varèse requires a cleaner attack – tighter than these broad rhythmic brushstrokes.

No such problems for **Riccardo Chailly** with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1996, aided and abetted by a crack team of Decca engineers. Chailly also had the advantage of having the composer and Varèse protégé Chou Wen-chung sitting behind the glass in the studio as he feasted upon Chou's scrupulous new edition of *Amériques*. And Chailly hands us a paradox. Varèse's sensory overload can be most

powerfully relayed to listeners, this interpretation proposes, when approached with objectifying distance. The opening alto flute solo and that inquisitive bassoon heckle (marked 'incisive') are kept noticeably one-dimensional and expressively counter-intuitive. A minim tied into the next bar is sustained without any hairpin *crescendo*, and the accompanying ostinato in the harp is maintained at Varèse's regulation *piano* dynamic marking. An unassuming comma dropped into a sentence in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* can be all that is needed to jump the narrative far into the future or back to the past, and Varèse's jump-cut tempo changes similarly befuddle our sense of continuity and time. By page three of the score, the opening *Moderato* has already crashed headlong into a *subito Animato molto quasi Presto* – but only for a bar – before heading back to the opening tempo, for two bars. And Chailly negotiates these coexisting zones of time with surgical precision.

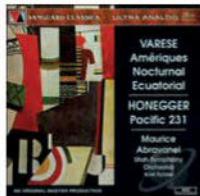
## HISTORIC CLASSIC

**Utah SO / Abravanel**

Vanguard Classics Ⓛ ▶ OVC4031

This hard-as-nails first recording of *Amériques* is prescient, containing in microcosm problems

and solutions identified by later conductors. Abravanel pushes towards noisy madness and turmoil, but never loses sight of the work's harmonic essence.



Chailly also excels at intimating that a weighty, game-changing event will, at some point, be emerging from the core of this music. Dropped throughout the score as harmonic anchor points are monolithic block chords, which with the end of the piece in sight begin to rip through the orchestra. Varèse orchestrates these chords for maximum impact. Earthed by a minor-sixth double-stop in the double basses and tuba – an interval tactfully contradicted by a sustained minor second from the two contrabass tubas – this spectrum of sound scrapes the sky with the shimmer of a cluster draped across the three piccolos and four flutes. Chailly's delicate internal balance is a precision piece of engineering that makes the chords veritably roar, especially as Varèse's diligently marked dynamics – initially *pppp* to *ffff*, via *f*, then different each time the chord strikes – are followed to the letter. With markers like these secured, Chailly gives himself plenty of licence to mine Varèse's layers of detail. Those melismatic percussion paragraphs that characterise the score skip with a balletic lilt, the snare drum player articulating with Buddy Rich-like crispness. Chailly allows himself a well-judged moment of repose around 14'00" as the music briefly stretches its lungs and develops motifs. Incidental details – a little flurry of bass clarinet activity – bob to the surface, while a gnarly microtonal viola solo holds no fears for the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's lead viola. **Mariss Jansons** dispatches the piece more in the vein of a dependable orchestral showpiece in a 2011 live radio recording with the same orchestra. In his diligently paced and carefully sculpted version, Jansons captures a hot, jazzy cartoon violence devoid of Chailly's layers of ambiguity.

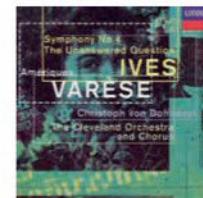
Compared with Chailly's 'cool' objectified impressionism, **Ingo Metzmacher** and the German Symphony Orchestra, Berlin, in 2007 conjure up an expressionistic performance. The opening alto flute solo exaggerates Varèse's slightly overcooked tempo indications – *accelerando* leading to *sempre accelerando* – with the net result that

## BENCHMARK

**Cleveland Orch / Dohnányi**

Decca Ⓛ 443 172-2

Dohnányi steers a clear course, presenting a steely balance of volatile mood changes and



harmonic consistency. He excels at contextualising the work in terms of time and place. Although the disc is 'nla', Decca has said it will be soon be available as a download.

the line feels rushed. As becomes clear from its first entry, Metzmacher's percussion section lacks the charcoal-burning sizzle of Chailly's; and what a pity that the cackling crow call so evident in Amsterdam gets lost in these Berlin generalities.

On the plus side, at 00'46" Metzmacher's off-stage brass balances elegantly against the orchestral *tutti*. At 6'12", as the orchestral texture temporarily closes in on descending crotchets in the high woodwind and strings, he puts a frame around pulsating offbeat semiquavers in the lower strings and harps, which has the alluring effect of gently rocking the music from side to side. Sadly, though, *Ameriques*'s double climax leaves Metzmacher floundering. Varèse's change of gear towards a superfast *Presto* – featuring a coiling, corkscrew melody with a generic Eastern flavour wailing on piccolos, oboes and E flat clarinet, accompanied by an oompah orchestral stampede – ought to hurtle forwards faster than the speed of light. Chailly's bebops on steroids, but under Metzmacher it lumbers forwards, the accompaniment too often overpowering the line. Similarly, the grand set-piece climactic section of the work – a mechanistic rampage in which a brass-woodwind call-and-response riff runs amok against other layers of material – is laboured and underwhelming.

#### BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE

Taking a fresh look at *Ameriques*, Varèse did more than merely revise. His aim was to reconfigure and streamline his structure, and his new *Ameriques* would represent a comprehensive re-edit, with stretches of entirely new music replacing material that had hit the cutting-room floor. It was not all 'gain gain' though. Incorporating the off-stage brass inside the main body of the orchestra weakens the music's psycho-geographic splendour, while some of the more fanciful percussion writing from 1922 is missed. Personally, I'd like to hear a conductor prepared to copy and paste the crow call, steamboat honks and cyclone whistle (which shrieks above the orchestra during the final pages, extending its usual tessitura by at least a couple of octaves) back into the 1929 version. But this remake does speak more authentically of Varèse's mature concerns. Explicit hat-tips towards Debussy, Schoenberg and Berg have been banished, and his Stravinsky dependency has been toned down. *Ameriques* constructs consciously abstracted walls of sound out of the structures implicit in *Ameriques*.

No record exists, regrettably, of Stokowski's premiere, and the first recording of the piece, in the revised



Varèse 'rearranges the chemistry of your brain'

version, would be made only in 1966, a year after Varèse's death. **Maurice Abravanel** with the Utah Symphony Orchestra crafts a creditable, accurate and visceral performance – a noteworthy achievement considering that no performance culture around Varèse's orchestral music had yet taken root. Abravanel's tendency to 'middle-ground' the composer's fastidious dynamic indications is a curious foible – for instance, at 00'35", the first entry of what had been the off-stage brass material, a *pp* crescendoing to *f*, exists in a nondescript medium loud – but otherwise he digs deep to excavate the foundations of this brutalist sonic architecture. At 13'40", where the earlier version floats towards an evocatory slipstream of harp *glissandos* and woodwind tremolos, Varèse instead punctures his structure with a dirty-bomb orchestral scream; and Abravanel remains ever alert to this reintensification.

Varèse's cuts and tweaks tightened the form, but now his concepts of 'organised sound' – which he had claimed interested him more than mere 'music' – come to the fore. A clutter of colliding tonalities push far beyond anyone's capacity to rationalise this superabundance of information that Varèse has stretched over the whole orchestra. Abravanel fearlessly throws the music towards white noise, only for syntactical order to be restored at 23'05" as the oncoming *Meno presto* locks the gestures back into harmonic and rhythmic unison. Also refashioned is the transition towards the corkscrew *Presto*. What had been a rather contrived episodic approach has been replaced by music that appears unexpectedly, startling the senses like an internet pop-up page. For the revision, the high woodwind section is sexed up by a xylophone that steadily picks out salient harmony notes, and Abravanel's players soar with supersonic velocity and grace – thrilling. **Pierre Boulez** and the New York Philharmonic, in 1975, would offer thrills of a different order. Abravanel's head-banging grandeur gave way to Boulez's trademark neat precision as he mapped a masterfully paced performance. Almost every page throws up a hitherto secreted detail. A secure sense of pitch temporarily disappears when, at 9'15", Boulez dovetails string *glissandos* in *divisi* violins (marked *pp*) with *fortissimo* chromatic *glissandos* in the flutes and piccolos, and the whole orchestra totters like it's wearing high heels on an ice rink.

#### A RENAISSANCE

When Boulez returned to *Ameriques* in 1995, neat precision had been usurped by something altogether more antiseptic, and his Chicago Symphony Orchestra remake is crushingly disappointing and bland. Worthy of a note too – if not necessarily

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### DATE / ARTISTS

		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1966	Utah SO / <b>Abravanel</b>	Vanguard Classics (B) ▷ OVC4031 (11/68*)
1975	New York PO / <b>Boulez</b>	Sony (F) SMK45844 (10/90)
1992	French Nat Orch / <b>Nagano</b>	Apex (S) (2) 2564 620872 (8/93*)
1993	Cleveland Orch / <b>Dohnányi</b>	Decca (F) 443 172-2 (11/94) - nla
1995	Chicago SO / <b>Boulez</b>	DG (F) 471 137-2GH, (M) 479 0340GTC
1995	Carnegie Mellon PO / <b>Izquierdo</b>	Mode (F) MODE58
1996	Royal Concertgebouw Orch / <b>Chailly*</b>	Decca (S) (2) ▷ 460 208-2DH2, (S) (2) 475 487-2DGR2 (10/98)
2002	Hungarian Nat PO / <b>Kocsis</b>	Budapest Music Centre (F) BMC102
2005	Polish Nat RSO / <b>Lyndon-Gee*</b>	Naxos (B) 8 557882 (10/08)
2007	German SO, Berlin / <b>Metzmacher*</b>	Challenge Classics (F) CC72644 (12/14)
2008	arr Bugallo for 2 pfs, 8 hands: <b>Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo</b> ; Briggs, Engel	Wergo (F) WER6708-2
2009	ORF RSO, Vienna / <b>de Billy</b>	Col Legno (F) WWE1CD20295
2011	Royal Concertgebouw Orch / <b>Jansons*</b>	RCO Live (S) (14) RCO15002
2011	Seattle SO / <b>Morlot</b>	Seattle Sym Media (F) SSM1006
2012	San Francisco SO / <b>Tilson Thomas</b>	SFS Media/Avie (F) (SFS) SFS0056 (2/13)

\* 1922 version



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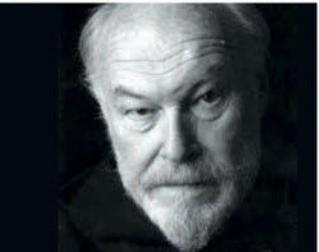
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Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony give 'a very rock'n'roll performance' of *Ameriques*

of your hard-earned cash – is **Kent Nagano**'s 1992 reading with the French National Orchestra. I use the word 'reading' advisedly. Even if it's not actually the case, the performance sounds casually thrown together. Mushy and shapeless brass entries near the beginning (those pungent trombone chords that end what had been the off-stage brass material) get matters off to a shaky start, and too often I'm left with the nagging sense that Nagano is working against the idiosyncratic grain of Varèse's orchestration as he balances chords. Out of place, too, is his camp little siren – the sound of air escaping a whoopee cushion.

**Christoph von Dohnányi** and the Cleveland Orchestra, recorded a year later (officially deleted but due to be made available as a download very soon), heralded a whole new generation of *Ameriques* – and a renaissance in the work's fortunes on disc was afoot. Dohnányi's performance occupies a middle path between Abravanel's devil-may-care abandon and the steely, all-seeing eye of Boulez, to offer the most balanced view yet of Varèse's score, all its elements and moods captured in proportion. As with Boulez and the NYPO, the final climax section roars and spits like Godzilla suddenly rising out of the sea, a moment that has grown organically out of everything that has come before. Throughout, Dohnányi delineates all the connective tissue with exceptional lucidity. During the corkscrew *Presto*, the chromatically slithery oompah accompaniment pumps away like a set of pistons as Dohnányi's swooning, glistening contouring of the theme recalls its fleeting first appearance as a string motif earlier in the piece.

There is whimsy here also, an aspect lost on Boulez. Dohnányi is unafraid to suggest that the cascading violin harmonics,

celeste and gambolling harp glissandi at 1'45" are pure Hollywood. And this makes the schizoid change of mood that follows – as the siren re-enters, heralding aggressively accented timpani, lower strings and wind – a real shocker. And, arguably, even more shocking is a brief snatch of slapstick comedy as Varèse breaches the fourth wall with a 'ha-ha-ha-waaah' trombone lick, as though Charlie Chaplin has wandered into the piece and kicked a policeman's behind. Boulez suffers the indignity and moves on as quickly as he can; but Dohnányi's trombonist goes for it, and with saucy relish.

Recorded in 1995, the Carnegie Mellon Philharmonic under **Juan Pablo Izquierdo** has its heart in the right place (if not microphones to pick up the harp that accompanies the opening flute solo), but this orchestral playing noticeably lacks polish, especially with big beasts like the Cleveland Orchestra roaming the field of play. For his 2002 recording, **Zoltán Kocsis** bolted the Amadinda Percussion Group on to the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra and a marvellously lived-in and individual performance emerged. Fast-paced, dramatic, and with life flowing through its orchestral veins at every turn, this recording sees Kocsis remaining entirely faithful to Varèse's vision of the future, while a vein of heroic romanticism also projects the piece as a latter-day Straussian tone-poem – a steampunk conceit. **Bertrand de Billy** with the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra of Vienna in 2009 feels overcooked, de Billy forever going for the kill where a little retrospection would be useful. **Michael Tilson Thomas** and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, from 2012, match the athleticism of Kocsis, but with brooding majesty giving way to adrenalin-fuelled glibness. When Kocsis's

upper strings enter as a body for the first time at 3'26" we're hit with a dystopian wall of sound; MTT teases with glitz effect. MTT has his trombonist actually vocalising laughter – a very nice touch indeed – but the wheels come off during the final call-and-response as that main brass and woodwind conversation struggles for space against all the background chatter.

#### END POINT

The best version, though, is by **Ludovic Morlot** and the Seattle Symphony, recorded live a few months earlier than MTT. They give a very rock'n'roll performance, no more so than during the final chords as the siren howls like a soprano with an iron lung acting a mad scene. Fittingly, Morlot paired his performance with Dvořák's *New World* Symphony, but this *Ameriques* also reminds us that Varèse is the key historical link to Xenakis, Feldman and a whole branch of modernist composers. Morlot exudes the joy of discovery – both his own of Varèse's score, but also this composer's discovery that sound must create an orchestration, rather than exist as a by-product of textbook notions of orchestration. Even when – at 12'40" – the trumpets and woodwind sound like Stravinsky sounding like Rimsky-Korsakov, Morlot sifts sound out of the orchestration in a spontaneous and invigorating way. And so, alongside Chailly, Abravanel and Dohnányi, Morlot forms an obvious front line with Kocsis also a strong contender. An alternative live performance by Chailly and the Concertgebouw Orchestra as part of a 13-CD set of live radio performances is essentially a rerun of the performance for the studio recording, with the same pacing, articulation and so on; but a transcription for two pianos, eight hands, played by the **Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo** with Amy Briggs and Benjamin Engeli, is a fascinating aside, even if it confirms that Varèse etched sound directly onto the orchestra – and that without the orchestration a vital artery has been cut. **G**

#### MODERN CLASSIC

##### **Seattle Symphony / Morlot**

Seattle Symphony Media © SSM1006  
Brazenly punk in his approach, Morlot insightfully reminds us that although Varèse's orchestration might be rooted in Stravinsky, Debussy and Schoenberg, the music's authentic sound world must fly freely of preset ideals of 'correct' orchestration.



# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

## The Opera Platform

### La troupe d'Orphée, March 3

The Opera Platform, an on-demand streaming platform, has a long list of partner operatic organisations, including Opera Europa (lead partner), ARTE, Wiener Staatsoper, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and Komische Oper Berlin. It offers at least one opera per month from one of its 15 partner theatres, with subtitles available in six different languages. Each opera is free on demand for six months. Opera2Day at The Hague's production of *La troupe d'Orphée*, looks particularly colourful. Inspired by Marc-Antoine Charpentier and the love story of *Orphée en Euridice*, it features a fictional troupe - a music-theatre ensemble consisting of dancers from De Dutch Don't Dance Division, singers Vox Luminis, and musicians from the Dutch Baroque ensemble, Opera2Day. [theoperaplatform.eu](http://theoperaplatform.eu)

## Barbican Hall, London & live on BBC Radio 3

### Sakari Oramo conducts Nielsen & Sibelius, March 3

Scandinavian contemporaries Nielsen and

Sibelius top and tail this concert from the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of their Scandinavian Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo, also featuring the BBC Singers. Nielsen's *An Imaginary Trip to the Faroe Islands* opens the evening, whilst Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen Suite* provides the climax. Also on the programme is the UK premiere of a BBC co-commission, Detlev Glanert's *Megaris*.

[barbican.org.uk](http://barbican.org.uk), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## Wigmore Hall, London & live on BBC Radio 3

### Carolyn Sampson sings English lute songs, March 6

Lutenist Matthew Wadsworth accompanies soprano Carolyn Sampson in this lunchtime concert celebrating English song. John Dowland numbers include *Now, O now I needs must part* and *A Dream*, while Purcell songs include *When first Amintas sued for a kiss*. Britten features too, including *The Soldier and the Sailor*. Most noteworthy of all, though, is the world premiere of Stephen Goss's brand new work for solo theorbo, *The Miller's Tale*.

[wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## Barbican Hall, London & BBC Radio 3 (recorded for future broadcast)

### Simone Young conducts Bartók & Eötvös, March 10

Set to be one of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's season highlights, this concert sees the orchestra perform a programme devoted to just two Hungarian works, under the baton of guest conductor Simone Young. First up is Bartók's virtuoso orchestral showpiece, *Concerto for Orchestra*. Then, mezzo Christine Rice and baritone Russell Braun star in the UK premiere of Peter Eötvös's one-act opera, *Senza Sangue*, which explores a single encounter during a civil war, in which a man kills a woman's father but spares her, and what happens when the two later cross paths once more.

[barbican.org.uk](http://barbican.org.uk), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## Philharmonie, Berlin & Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall

### Jonathan Nott conducts the German National Youth Orchestra, March 12

It's always worth drawing to your attention the

## ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

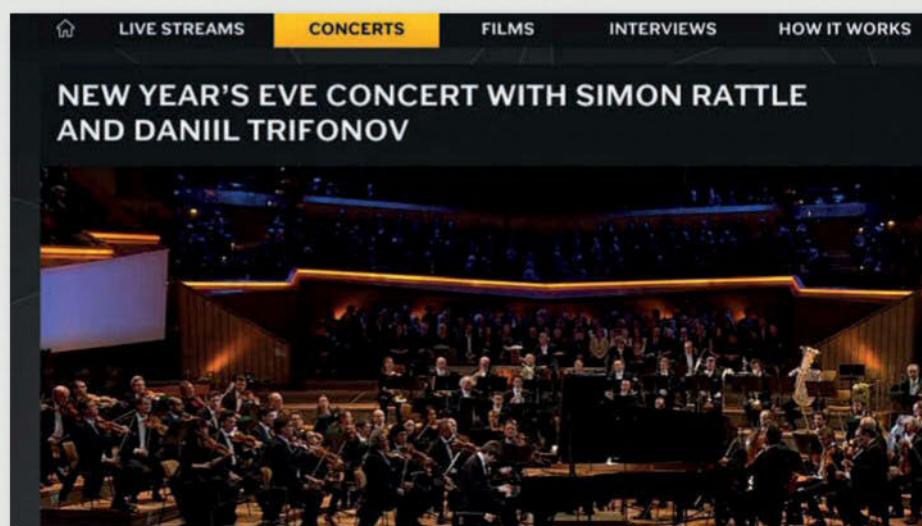
### Sir Simon Rattle and Daniil Trifonov bid farewell to 2016 with some musical fireworks in Berlin

#### New Year's Eve Concert

Most European orchestras welcome in the New Year with Strauss waltzes and polkas or the ubiquitous Beethoven Ninth. In Berlin's Philharmonie, the Sylvester Concert tends to offer an unusual alternative, something refreshingly different to allow the Berlin Philharmonic a chance to let its hair down. The results last New Year's Eve were decidedly mixed.

Kabalevsky's bustling Overture to *Colas Breugnon*, with its tongue-in-cheek Meistersinger reference, gets the party started with a bang. William Walton's *Façade* is a big surprise, the Germans showing they completely get English whimsy. The 'Tango-Pasodoble' has a delectable snap, while Sir Simon Rattle coaxes an insouciant 'Popular Song' from his superb woodwind team. Thankfully, this is an orchestral selection with no place for the dreaded 'reciter'.

*Gramophone*'s current Artist of the Year, Daniil Trifonov, is a rather shy guest of honour, but his performance of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 3 is poised, unhurried and full of limpid ease.



He brings great clarity to the score, without undue sentimentalism. We get plenty of keyboard close-ups of Trifonov, hair flopping, sitting studiously upright. He displays little emotion on his face, but his fingers spin poetry. The performance is spun out too far though, especially in the first movement which, at 19 minutes, is extremely slow – this is an *Allegro ma non*

*tanto* which leans too heavily away from the *Allegro* instruction. Ideally the concerto needed some of the life Rattle injects into three of Antonín Dvořák's Op 72 *Slavonic Dances* which are unsmiling and driven too hard. **Mark Pullinger**

Available via various subscription packages, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at [digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

## ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

**Daniel Barenboim and his Staatskapelle Berlin start their Bruckner symphonies in Paris and finish in New York**

## Bruckner

At the end of January, Daniel Barenboim conducted an unprecedented cycle of the nine numbered Bruckner symphonies at Carnegie Hall. A fortnight earlier he presented a starter-course, of Symphonies Nos 1-3, in Paris. You can't fault his energy or commitment in the service of music that demands special powers of persuasion. Or indeed the playing of the Staatskapelle Berlin.

Over 40 years Barenboim has refined these symphonies in ways that should win them new friends while disconcerting those of us for whom Bruckner is still the awkward kid in the corner of Romantic symphonism. Pauses for thought, changes of tack – the things that make Bruckner Bruckner – have been sacrificed at the altar of a continuous singing line. The results are undeniably exhilarating in Nos 1 and 2, pressed forward to peremptory conclusions by sweetly pliable strings and a thunderous brass section, with the winds (repository of what is most often odd and strange about this music) left more to their own devices.

The Third suffers more from a fussy reshaping of the motto theme, some arbitrary pulling out of secondary lines and a perfunctory dash to the finish. Horn fluffs here and there are less bothersome than the chaotic filming, which affords us frequent glimpses of the conductor behind

occasional free live-streamed concerts the Berlin Philharmonic broadcasts, and this Sunday-morning offering looks particularly worthy of catching. It features Jonathan Nott conducting the acclaimed German National Youth Orchestra through a programme centred around musical visions of death; not the most cheery of subject matters perhaps, but it's wonderful repertoire nevertheless. Beginning the concert is the orchestral version of Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. Then comes Mahler's heartbreakingly *Kindertotenlieder* with mezzo Christa Mayer, and then finally Shostakovich's Symphony No 15.

[digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

### Boston MA Symphony Hall & 99.5 WCRB

**Alisa Weilerstein premieres Matthias  
Pintscher's new cello concerto, March 23-25**

If you catch just one concert on our events pages this month, then make it this one. Having premiered Pascal Dusapin's *Outscape* with the Chicago Symphony last spring, the cellist Alisa Weilerstein is giving the premiere



**DANIEL BARENBOIM CONDUCTS BRUCKNER'S  
SYMPHONY NO. 9**  
STAATSKAPELLE BERLIN

a violinist's head or through a forest of unfocused bows, and unsatisfactory recorded sound, which is as distant and disengaged as the too-frequent resort to a wide-panned angle of the entire hall.

In every way the Carnegie Hall Ninth is a vast improvement: cleaner and clearer in sound and vision with an irresistible sense of intent and direction towards the cliff-edge where the symphony's *Adagio* leaves us. In an hour-long filmed interview Barenboim raises the unavoidable influence of Wagner, both on Bruckner and on his

of yet another major new cello concerto, this time Matthias Pintscher's *Un despertar*, written expressly for her. She performs with the Boston Symphony, who co-commissioned it, under the baton of François-Xavier Roth. Also on the programme are Berlioz's *Le Corsaire* Overture and Beethoven's Symphony No 6, the *Pastoral*. The concert on March 25 will be broadcast live and then made available to listen to on demand.

[bso.org, classicalwcrb.org/programs/  
boston-symphony-orchestra](http://bso.org, classicalwcrb.org/programs/boston-symphony-orchestra)

### Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

**Mozart's Idomeneo and Verdi's La traviata,  
March 25**

There are two Met 'Live in HD' broadcasts this month. The first, on March 11, sees star Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva sing Violetta alongside Michael Fabiano as Alfredo in Willy Decker's stylised contemporary 2005 setting of *La traviata*. However we're going to focus on the other cinematic offering from the Met this month, which is a rare chance to see Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's

own evolving understanding of it. The Staatskapelle's own background as a Wagner orchestra contributes to outer movements that break, thunder and recede in *Tristan*-like, overlapping waves, with the orchestra's superb first flute and oboe as the principal actors in the eye of the storm, cast adrift from tonal moorings.

**Peter Quantrill**

[All available to stream for free at medici.tv  
until April 27. Symphonies Nos 1-3 also  
available to stream for free until July 4, 2017  
at live.philharmoniedeparis.fr/](http://All available to stream for free at medici.tv until April 27. Symphonies Nos 1-3 also available to stream for free until July 4, 2017 at live.philharmoniedeparis.fr/)

spectacular 1982 production of Mozart's *Idomeneo* in its first revival in over a decade. The popular American tenor Matthew Polenzani sings the title-role, which he has also sung to acclaim at Covent Garden. Also in the cast is British mezzo Alice Coote in the trouser role of Idomeneo's son, Idamante, and Elza van den Heever as Elettra. James Levine conducts.

[metopera.org](http://metopera.org)

### Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

**Madama Butterfly, March 30**

This revival of Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's production features Albanian soprano Ermonela Jaho as Butterfly, one of the roles she's most associated with, but her first time singing it in London. She'll then go on to sing the role at her Washington National Opera debut in May, under the baton of Philippe Auguin. Back to the Covent Garden production, and Sir Antonio Pappano conducts, with a cast that also includes Marcelo Puente as Pinkerton.

[roh.org.uk](http://roh.org.uk)

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THIS MONTH the latest value-for-money amplifier from NAD, luxury headphones from Bowers & Wilkins and why you should shout at the TV. **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

## Audio products are literally flying high

From giant consumer electronics companies to specialist brands, new hi-fi products keep on coming

**C**one of the themes of the moment is the way the world's big consumer electronics companies seem to be rediscovering audio, which can only be a good thing. Last month I wrote about Samsung snapping up Harman International, and in this month's Audio Essay I'm looking at how another major player in the connected world is aiming to revolutionise the way we play music.

However, while the first fruits of the Samsung/Harman deal are yet to be seen, Korean rival LG is increasing its stake in the home audio market – with a flying speaker! Well, a levitating speaker, anyway, in the form of its PJ9 ①. This egg-shaped wireless speaker will not only play music, podcasts and other content from a home network but will do so while floating above its charging base on powerful electromagnets. It has omnidirectional sound dispersion and a 10-hour battery life, and when the juice runs low will settle back on to its 'Levitation Station' base where it is recharged wirelessly. Brian Kwon, the company's head of home entertainment products, says the PJ9 'is not only eye-



catching but also communicates the message that LG is serious about bringing something different to the table'. Or in this case, floating just above the table.

Back to earth with a bump, and it has been confirmed that turntable and engineering company SME has been bought by Cadence Group, which also has controlling interests in Spendor, Siltech Audio and Crystal Cables. The SME range of products ② will now be distributed in the UK by Padood, and new SME CEO Stuart McNeilis says the takeover will bring 'increased investment allowing for new product development: the company will build on its legacy of designing and manufacturing the best tonearms and turntables in the world'.

Another long-established name, McIntosh Laboratory, has just launched its first dedicated phono pre-amplifier, the MP100 ③. Selling for £2750, the new model has both moving coil and moving magnet inputs, with adjustable loading to bring out the best in a range of cartridges, and also has a mono mode. Outputs are provided on both conventional RCA phono sockets and balanced XLRs, and the MP100 also has built-in analogue-to-digital conversion, enabling LPs to be digitised as 96kHz/24bit data and fed to a computer via a Type B USB port or to outboard digital devices via optical and coaxial outputs.

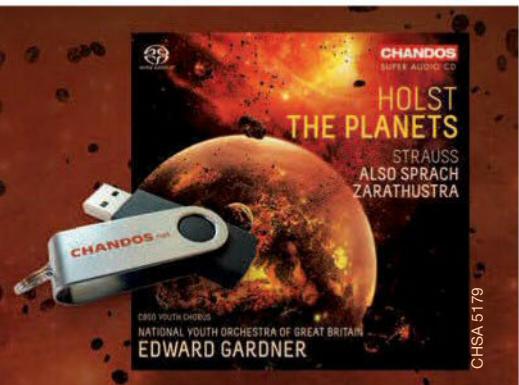
On the subject of all things digital, there's a new digital output board from HiFiBerry ④, which specialises in turning the little Raspberry Pi computer into a high-end audio device. The company says the new Digi+ Pro board, which sells for £38, is its most advanced design to date, and has separate clocks for 44.1kHz and 48kHz sampling rates and their multiples, plus the option of adding BNC and I2S outputs in addition to the standard coaxial and optical sockets, and even to use two power supplies for enhanced quality. It's available from [hifiberry.com](http://hifiberry.com). ⑤

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Lisa Batiashvili's sparkling set of the Sibelius and Tchaikovsky violin concertos really shines in the 96kHz/24bit download, with the orchestra and soloist captivatingly balanced.



Another excellent hi-res recording from the dependable LSO Live label, this set of English string music under Roman Simovic is truly demonstration-quality.

## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

## NAD C 368

The Canadian budget company's new model shows that it can mix it in the mid-market, too

**F**or many people of a certain age, thinking of the NAD brand will bring back wistful 'first amplifier' memories. As I think I may have mentioned in the pages in the past, my first foray into serious hi-fi was with one of the company's 3020 models, bought from the now long-gone Hi-Fi Markets on the corner of Cambridge's marketplace. In those days, the area was a good hunting ground for the budding audiophile, with several hi-fi shops within a stone's throw, and at least two very good record stalls on the market itself, where the latest releases were eagerly snapped up. These days that shop on the corner is, if Google Street View is up to date, a mobile phone store – such is the way of the world! – but the NAD 3020 is still revered as a model that reinvented the common idea of what an affordable hi-fi amplifier should be.

In an age when front panels were cluttered with knobs and switches, many of which most buyers never used, and black and champagne gold were the standard finishes, the 3020 stood out with its simple row of push-buttons for source selection, not much more than tone and volume controls – oh, and a row of flashing LEDs to show the power output. Designed by company co-founder Bjørn Erik Edvardsen, whose 'BEE' products have

long been a mainstay of the company's range, it was clad in a slightly strange off-black finish, prone to looking grey in some lights and greenish brown in others, and had its inputs on a 'shelf' to the rear, not directly on the back panel. All very

This is an extremely clean-sounding amplifier without ever straying into excessive brightness

revolutionary, but not so odd that the company didn't sell this £100-ish amplifier and its successors in enormous quantities, a success story marked with the arrival of the even more unusual-looking D 3020 model in recent times.

By comparison, the £799 C 368, part of a new three-strong range of mainstream amplifiers from the company, is almost conventional, its simple fascia embellished with a large, clear display panel. However, the company's description of the product hints that something unusual is going on here: this is a 'Hybrid Digital DAC Amplifier', no less, and the near-minimalist face it presents to the world belies a component of unusual flexibility.

Between its foundation in the UK in 1972 and the present day, NAD has passed

## NAD C 368



**Type** Integrated amplifier

**Price** £799

**Power output** 80W per channel

**Analogue inputs** Two line, plus moving magnet phono

**Digital inputs** Two optical, two coaxial, plus Bluetooth with aptX

**Outputs** Preouts for power amplifier or subwoofer with switchable filter; two sets of speakers, headphones

**Other connections** 12V trigger and infrared remote in/out, RS232 for system control, USB-A for service

**Tone controls** Yes

**Options** Add-on modular boards for extra analogue inputs, HDMI, wireless multiroom, etc

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 43.5x71x40.7cm  
[nadelectronics.com](http://nadelectronics.com)

through several hands. First it was bought by Danish group AudioNord, and since 1999 it has been part of the Lenbrook Group, headquartered in Ontario and also home to PSB Loudspeakers and the Bluesound multiroom audio range. These days the NAD range runs all the way from

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Fitted into one of the C 368's expansion slots, this module brings the ability to stream music from Bluesound storage devices.



the entry-level C 136BEE model up to the massive Masters Series M12 digital pre-amplifier and M22 stereo power amp, which are more than able to hold their own against the top-flight high-end brands.

And, in a perfect example of the idea of 'trickle-down' technology, the C 368 has inherited from those top-end products the company's Modular Design Construction, which enables features to be added or swapped simply by fitting plug-in expansion boards. For example, a £299 BluOS board is available, allowing the amplifier to be integrated into a Bluesound multiroom audio system, where it will appear as a 'zone' able to address music stored on a network, streaming music services and the like. Two of these MDC slots are provided, accessed via the rear panel to make it easy for users to swap modules to suit their requirements and to allow future system expansion, with other options including a higher-quality MM/MC/balanced input module and one offering HDMI inputs and outputs.

The amplifier itself is already pretty well equipped without that add-on, however. It delivers 80W per channel, and as well as a high-quality moving magnet phono stage has two line inputs, two optical digital inputs and two coaxial electrical, as well as pre-outs to allow the use of an external amplifier or an active subwoofer, two sets of speaker outputs and a headphone socket. The icing on the cake for those wanting to stream music from a phone or tablet is built-in Bluetooth with aptX, and the amplifier also comes with remote control and 12V trigger inputs and outputs, and an RS232 socket for integration into custom installation systems. A USB Type A port is also provided, for service/upgrading purposes.

Most of the options here are accessed via the menu system, including input enable/disable/renaming; a high-pass filter for use when a subwoofer is connected; tone and balance controls; and auto-sensing standby/wake. And a switch on the rear of the amplifier opens up another intriguing possibility: the C 368's power amp section can be switched into bridged mono mode, more than doubling its power. However, an extra power amplifier will be needed for stereo in this configuration.

**PERFORMANCE**

Even as standard, the NAD amplifier is in no way lacking in power. One aspect of the design, which uses a customised version of the Hypex UcD Class D module in the output stages, is that while the amp has the same nominal output into both 8 ohm and 4 ohm loads, it can deliver very high instantaneous peak power – up to 600W – when required. And that's very much in evidence, not just with highly dynamic music but also in the crispness and definition with which this amplifier plays rhythms, and the detail it delivers with, for example, small-ensemble chamber works.

This is an extremely clean-sounding amplifier without ever straying into excessive brightness or any sense of being 'technical' or 'mechanical'. Instead it has both warmth and weight, a clear, fluid midband fully able to bring out the character of voices and instruments, and an open, vivid and yet sweet treble. That, plus NAD's familiar ability to drive just about any speakers with almost disdainful ease, makes this both a highly compatible amplifier and an extremely compelling listen.

Whether with large-scale choral or orchestral works or the more intimate solo piano of Jens Harald Bratlie on his 'Vers la lumière' set, another of those excellent recordings from Norway's 2L label, the NAD amplifier is both captivating in the way it draws the listener into the music and rewarding in the levels of information it conveys.

Even with 'busy' recordings such as Tamsin Waley-Cohen's reading of the violin concertos of Roy Harris and John Adams, the NAD's ability to deliver all the power of the BBC Symphony Orchestra while still maintaining focus on the soloist is impressive, and testament to the lack of effort with which this amplifier plays music. There's no thickening of the sound even during the denser passages, and the sound stage image remains solid and focused.

That's the major appeal of the sound here, and of many past amplifiers from this brand, dating all the way back to that original 3020 design on which the company's reputation was built – it just sounds 'right', requiring the listener to

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**The C 368 launches into a competitive market sector, in which you'll also find NAD's striking-looking D 7050 amplifier, which comes complete with Apple AirPlay and Spotify Connect built-in, though it lacks the modular expansion facility. It sells for £899.**

**Arcam A29 and the Audiolab 8300A**

The Arcam A29 and the Audiolab 8300A, at £849 and £899 respectively,



are more conventional. Both are updated versions of classic amplifier designs, with an all-analogue design for the audio purists and the ability to drive a wide range of speakers. Details from [arcam.co.uk](http://arcam.co.uk) and [audiolab.co.uk](http://audiolab.co.uk), while Audiolab also has the compact M-ONE amplifier for the same kind of money: in a half-width case and with digital inputs including USB-Type B, it will appeal to 'desktop hi-fi' enthusiasts and those for whom space is tight.

**Cyrus ONE**

The Cyrus ONE amplifier is similarly compact, and sells for £699. It harks back to the original Cyrus I amplifier but is up to date in its specification, including built-in Bluetooth for instant streaming from computers and portable devices. You can find out more at [cyrus.co.uk](http://cyrus.co.uk).



make no allowances for what it's doing to the music. Instead, one can just get on with enjoying the smooth, dynamic and highly involving presentation, which is just as it should be: this is an amplifier as at home with the fine detail of solo instruments as it is with the scale of orchestral, choral or operatic recordings.

The C 368 is hardly lacking in competition at this price level, with many of the well-known hi-fi manufacturers having contenders to challenge it, but it has the wherewithal to shine in the sub-£1000 amplifier sector, plus the flexibility to make it an excellent long-term investment. **G**

## ● REVIEW BOWERS & WILKINS P9 SIGNATURE

# B&W's upmarket 'phones could be worth a listen

Launched in the speaker company's 50th anniversary year, this flagship headphone is unashamedly luxurious - and with sound to live up to the looks

ike many a loudspeaker company, Bowers & Wilkins has in recent years diversified into various market sectors to broaden its appeal. As well as its range of active models aimed at the 'iPod generation', including the celebrated Zeppelin range, it has branched out into in-car solutions for some of the world's best-known car manufacturers, from Jaguar to Maserati.

The headphones we have here, the £699 P9 Signature, slots in as the flagship of an impressive line-up first launched with the compact and lightweight P5 model. Inspired by the 'cans' in use in old photographs of Abbey Road Studios, with which the company has an enduring association, the P5 is now available in an enhanced Series 2 version and with a wire-free Bluetooth variant, as part of an extensive headphone range. The range has grown to encompass P3 and P7 models, and also the C5 in-ear 'phones.

**The P9 Signature is one of the most speaker-like headphone designs I've had the privilege of hearing**

For the P9 Signature, the Bowers & Wilkins designers have clearly upped their game once more. Like its other offerings, the new model is still designed for mobile use, and still folds into a carrying case to make it more portable, but the build is even more solid than that of past offerings from the company, and the design more luxurious.

In fact, the P9 Signature uses cast aluminium for the hangers from which the earpieces are suspended on slick two-axis mounts, and the rich finish is in Saffiano leather from the Scabrenta tannery in Italy, whose products are more usually employed for upmarket handbags and other luggage. The headphones come with a travel pouch in suede-effect Alcantara, trimmed with the same leather, and are supplied with a 5m cable for home use, along with a 6.3mm adapter, a 1.2m cable for portable use and another of the same length complete with inline microphone/remote for use with iOS devices. At the time of writing there were plans to launch a fourth cable, fitted with

Apple's Lightning connector, which will be supplied free to buyers of the headphones.

However, the really clever stuff here is in the audio engineering, as usual the work of team at the Bowers & Wilkins research centre in Steyning. The 40mm drive units are of a semi-piston design derived from the company's speaker designs, and combine light weight and high compliance for speed with stiffness for accuracy. The drivers are mounted in a composite chassis and then on to an aluminium plate designed to reduce resonances, and aren't pointed straight at the ears, as is common in many headphones, but a little forwards and angled at 15 degrees to give a more 'speaker-like' presentation.

The earcups are also made from a composite material, and decoupled from the headband to avoid mechanical noise as well as sound transmission between the channels. The earpads use memory foam to enable them to mould to the shape of the user's head and, while this improves the 'seal', they're also designed to allow controlled air leakage for a more open sound.

### PERFORMANCE

These aren't exactly the lightest headphones in the business, tipping the scales at a substantial 415g, but in use they're extremely comfortable. The flexible headband and smooth-acting hanger adjustment makes it easy to get a good fit, and those memory foam earpads fit snugly to the ears without exerting undue pressure. Isolation of external noise is very good, but at the same time there's no sense of being 'shut in', as can be the case with some more conventional closed-back designs.

And the same applies to the sound. This is one of the most speaker-like headphone designs I've had the privilege of hearing, bearing comparison with the Focal Elear model (reviewed in December) and the excellent Oppo PM-1 I tend to use as a reference in these matters.

In fact, it goes beyond the 'speaker effect' in some ways, creating the most magically three-dimensional presentation, far from the 'in the head' stereotype of headphone sound. Not only does it cast an image before you in which performers are



**BOWERS & WILKINS P9 SIGNATURE**

**Type** Closed-back headphones

**Drivers** 40mm

**Frequency range** 2Hz-30kHz

**Nominal impedance** 22 ohms

**Accessories supplied** 1.2m and 5m

standard cables, with 3.5mm plug and 6.3mm adapter; 1.2m MFi cable with in-line microphones; carrying pouch

**Weight** 415g

**[bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://bowers-wilkins.co.uk)**

placed with almost uncanny precision, it also creates a wonderful sense of space and presence, such that the occasional element appearing somewhere where you don't expect possible from headphones can be quite startling. I'd advise against listening to well-produced Radio 4 supernatural drama via these headphones!

With music the startling 'offstage' effects aren't quite as nerve-jangling, but the ability of the P9 Signature headphones to create a broad, deep sound stage is totally captivating, as is readily apparent with a recording such as the LSO String Ensemble's set of Vaughan Williams, Britten and Elgar under Roman Simovic (LSO Live). The stately opening of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* has delicious weight and presence, and the vibrant string sound throughout the set is beautifully realised, with even the smallest detail readily apparent.

Yes, these headphones are unashamedly expensive but they're far from unique in that, and the upmarket personal audio market seems to be very active at the moment. If you're serious about keeping your music to yourself, they should definitely be on your 'must listen' list. **G**

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**ESSAY**

# Speakers: you listen to them, they listen to you

Voice activation is staging something of a comeback as part of the much-vaunted 'internet of things', and it may mark a power-shift in the world of home entertainment

To be honest, I've never really got on with voice-activated systems.

Exciting though it may seem to be able to bark an order at your car or phone and have it do your bidding, it just never seems to work for me – or at least never seems to do what I want.

When I bought my first car with voice command for the phone connectivity and the navigation system, I sat excitedly in the drive when I got it home following its set-up routine, training it to recognise my voice as I chanted numbers

and words at its prompts, and thinking how much safer all this was going to be instead of fumbling for buttons and tapping on a screen. Didn't quite work like that: after a day or two of phoning people at random, or phoning people when telling the system where I wanted to go, I gave up. And when I bought another new car with voice recognition, I simply didn't bother with it.

Same goes for the phone. My iPhone sits on my desk when I am working and frequently launches its Siri 'helper' app when it hears on my audio system something it thinks sounds like 'Hey Siri': it makes an annoying plink and shows a message asking 'What can I help you with?' I've given up growling 'It should be "With what can I help you?"', as that only seems to encourage it, and now it sometimes says 'yes' or 'hello there', or more often than not just gives up and goes back to sleep.

Yes, you can provoke it in idle moments by teasing it with famous movie lines, but it seems Siri has got wise – it may just sigh or ask you if you don't have better things to do with your time. Someone deep in Apple has a sense of humour, it seems.

However, it seems voice operation is becoming more popular these days, and various similar systems are now available, such as Microsoft's Cortana, Google's



Lenovo's Smart Assistant speaker is just one of a growing range of devices designed for the new generation of voice control

prosaically named Assistant and Amazon's Alexa. I was amused, having tried various TVs with alleged voice control, to discover that the Amazon Fire TV stick bought by the son of a friend had a remote control with voice operation – oh, and that it was as hit and miss as I expected – but the word is that such control systems are set to become

*I've given up growling 'It should be "With what can I help you?"', as that only seems to encourage it*

more commonplace. And they'll become a means of controlling not just what you want to watch but also the music you wish to play, and even your heating and lighting and anything else able to be incorporated into what the computer people call 'the same eco-system'.

It's all part of the much-vaunted 'internet of things' – a term bandied around for a few years now without much impact on our lives but which seems to be enjoying a renaissance with connected home appliances and systems. And audio systems.

It's part of a now-familiar move by companies outside the conventional realm of consumer electronics to stake a greater claim in the home entertainment/

technology field. Just as the likes of Spotify, Tidal, Apple and Google have changed the way many consume music and video content, now the likes of Amazon want to be much more than just a supplier of mail order goods: instead they want to help us run our lives. Or perhaps they just want to run our lives.

The Amazon Echo device looks simple enough. It's a wireless speaker, and there's no shortage of those on the market. But at its heart is Alexa, combined with seven microphones and advanced noise cancellation so it can always hear what you say – so well, in fact, that it needs

a mute button to save it reacting to your every 'thinking out loud' moment when it thinks it might have heard you say its name to wake it up!

You can use Echo to summon up music from the likes of Spotify or internet radio, which is quite neat once you get the hang of it – or it gets the hang of you – but it will also let you adjust your heating using Nest, Hive or other 'smarthome' systems systems, order a takeaway using the Just Eat platform, summon an Uber car to get you away from its always-listening 'ears' or check whether your BMW has enough fuel (or battery power) for a quick escape.

So far, so clever – or gimmicky, depending on your point of view. But the idea is spreading like wildfire, with more manufacturers joining the party, to the extent that this voice control is becoming not just a novelty, but a 'thing'. Just recently we've seen computer company Lenovo offering its Smart Assistant, a less expensive Alexa-running speaker/voice interface, complete with a Harman Kardon edition offering better sound at a premium, and TVs are starting to appear in the States with Alexa control built in.

All of a sudden, this is beginning to look like a new trend – or at least the revival of something often seen in old sci-fi films but never really practical until now. Shouting at the TV may never be the same again. **G**

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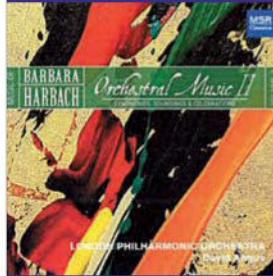
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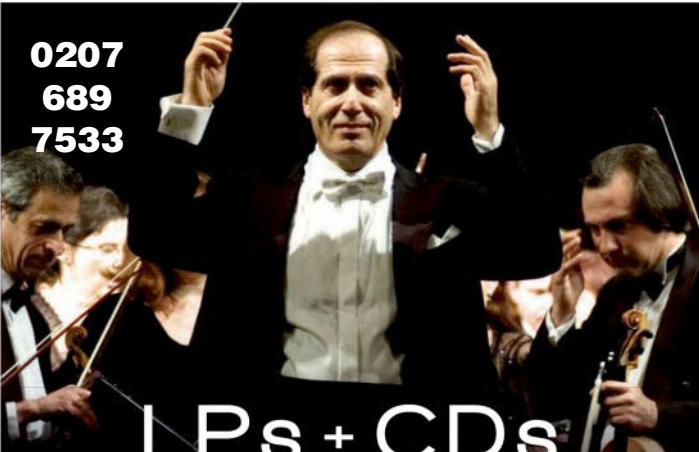
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# NOTES & LETTERS

Pauses between Mahler movements • Yehudi Menuhin recalled • Myra Hess and encores

*Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com*

## Mahler and pauses

I read Roger Ainsworth's January letter (page 122) on the performance of Mahler's Ninth at which the third and fourth movements were played without a break with great interest. Not having experienced a public performance of this symphony that adopted this practice, I cannot say if it would invariably be 'shattering', but I did attend a performance of Mahler's Second Symphony some years ago, when, in one of his last public appearances in London, Lorin Maazel, and the whole of the Festival Hall audience, observed a three- to four-minute silence after the end of the first movement. This was certainly very moving, and for me, at least, set the remainder of the symphony in a new light. However, I would imagine that few conductors have followed either practice in these symphonies. To my knowledge, neither Bruno Walter (in the Ninth) nor Otto Klemperer (in both) did so, and I attended performances by the latter of both symphonies. Having had personal contact with Mahler, why, I wonder, did they not establish such a precedent if it had been the composer's express wish or preference?

*Keith Pearce  
Penzance, Cornwall*

## Menuhin remembered

Your article 'Never just a violinist' (April 2016, page 11) brought tears to my eyes. When Yehudi died, I felt as if my heart had been ripped from my chest. As a transgendered life-sentenced prisoner, it has not been easy to make or develop any friendships, yet Yehudi never let my 'issues' get between our own friendship. His many letters to me informed not only my own sense of morality and ethics, but also made me the education-thirsty person that I am today.

As I started to teach myself to read and write, I began to visit prison libraries where, on one occasion, I discovered a book on Yehudi Menuhin. From the picture on the cover, I recognised him as the man that I had met beside the Albert Memorial opposite London's Royal Albert Hall. I was on the run from my children's home and, out of curiosity, I asked the man what was in the odd-shaped case that was next to him. He opened the case and

## Letter of the Month

### Myra Hess's 'encore'

Stephen Plaistow's review of Sir András Schiff's ECM recording, 'Encores after Beethoven' (February, page 68), and his rumination on when it is appropriate to play encores, reminded me of a sunny May evening in 1954 when, with a blackbird singing lustily outside, I heard Myra Hess perform her signature programme of Beethoven's last three sonatas in the Senate House at Cambridge.

The applause at the end after Op 111 was rapturous. After several recalls Dame Myra, by then arrayed in the scarlet robes of a Doctor of Music, held up her hands to quieten us and said: 'If I play anything else I'll have to play the three sonatas again!' We let her go and I walked on air out of the Senate House



Dame Myra Hess: no encore after Beethoven

to find that my bike had been pinched (I got it back a day or two later).

*Michael Johnson  
via email*

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showed the fiddle to me. He then held it like a banjo and plucked a tune for me. When I told him my story, he replied that everyone has their own horror story to tell and that I should focus on the goodness in my heart and nurture it. After encouraging me to return to the children's home, I never forgot our chance meeting and the kindness that he showed me. Tinged with a sense of melancholy, I think of him every time that I lift my own violin to my shoulder.

When I wrote to Yehudi from prison, his words transformed my life. I embraced my violin with an unparalleled passion as Yehudi taught me the difference between a German bow hold, the Russian and the Franco-Belgian. He sent me books by Carl Flesch and Ivan Gulyamian, and made me see my violin as a part of my own body that I could use to transform my own emotions into something wonderful.

He told me that I had to work on developing my self-confidence and self-esteem. He always promoted the importance of education and it was to impress Yehudi that I eventually wrote

two books. With his encouragement, I also teach the violin. Because I have mental health issues that put me on the autistic spectrum, it is unlikely that I will ever be released. But so long as I have my violin, I will never be alone and will always have a friend.

*Sarah Baker  
HM Prison Lewes, East Sussex*

### Toscanini revisited

Inspired by your January feature (page 11), I explored my library of recordings for Toscanini performances, and relived the intense excitement of his versions of Beethoven symphonies, Respighi's *Fountains* and *Pines*, and many operas.

I also made a wonderful discovery on YouTube of a filmed performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I had never seen him conducting before. What a revelation of his technique. The musicians were positively on the end of his baton.

Thank you for your guidance in this matter and many others.

*John Turner  
via email*

# OBITUARIES

One of the UK's finest clarinettists and a much-loved soprano

## GERVASE DE PEYER

*Clarinetist and conductor*

*Born April 11, 1926*

*Died February 4, 2017*



Gervase de Peyer, Principal Clarinet of the London Symphony Orchestra from 1956 to 1973, has died at the age of 90. Born in London he studied

with Frederick Thurston at the Royal College of Music as well as the piano with Arthur Alexander. After a period of National Service in the Royal Marines Service Band, he returned to the RCM and then studied with Louis Cahuzac in Paris.

Before joining the LSO, de Peyer played in Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia under such eminent conductors as Herbert von Karajan, Guido Cantelli, Otto Klemperer, and Wilhelm Furtwängler.

In 1950 he was a founding member, and occasional conductor, of the Melos Ensemble with whom he played until 1974, during which time they made numerous fine recordings including a now classic account of Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* for Decca. They were also the chamber ensemble for the premiere, as well as first recording, of Britten's *War Requiem*. De Peyer also played with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

As a conductor he worked with the English Chamber Orchestra, LSO Wind Ensemble and the Haydn Orchestra. As a soloist he championed new works for clarinet by Arnold Cooke, Berthold Goldschmidt, Joseph Horovitz, Alun Hoddinott, William Mathias, Thea Musgrave, Edwin Roxburgh, Michael Cave and Miklós Rózsa. In April 1964 Gervase de Peyer gave the London premiere of Francis Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata.

He recorded extensively: as a concerto soloist in many of the central works of the clarinet repertoire, and in chamber music often with his regular partner the pianist Gwenneth Pryor.

As a teacher he worked at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music and, in the US, Queens College and Mannes School of Music in New York and at the University of Seattle.

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION, SEDGE LEBLANG/METROPOLITAN OPERA ARCHIVES, JAVIER DEL REAL/TEATRO REAL/WARNER CLASSICS

## ROBERTA PETERS

*Soprano*

*Born May 4, 1930*

*Died January 18, 2017*



One of America's best-loved sopranos, who enjoyed a 35-year association with the Metropolitan Opera, has died at the age of 86. Born in The Bronx, New York City, Peters (or, to use her father's name, Peterman) started singing at an early age and was encouraged by the tenor Jan Peerce to study music; she worked with William Herman who, after six years, introduced her to the impresario Sol Hurok who,

in turn, organised an audition with the Metropolitan Opera's General Manager, Rudolf Bing. She sang the Queen of the Night's 'Der Hölle Rache' from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* – with its fearsome high notes – and clearly made such an impression that the Met engaged her for the role in February 1951. Her Met debut, though, came three months earlier than planned when Bing asked her to step in for an ailing Nadine Conner as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* – Fritz Reiner conducted and Peters had a triumph.

With a light, agile voice, Peters made a speciality of the soubrette and coloratura repertoire, singing roles like Mozart's Susanna, Despina, Zerlina and Queen of the Night, Rossini's Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Richard Strauss's Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Verdi's Nanetta (*Falstaff*) and Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*), Adina in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and Norina in *Don Pasquale*. She would later sing slightly heavier roles including Mimi, Juliette, Manon and Violetta. She bade farewell to the stage at the Met in 1985 as Gilda (*Rigoletto*).

Writing in *Gramophone* in 1957, Philip Hope-Wallace stated: 'She is a most appealing singer; not another Tetrazzini perhaps, but with something of the astonishing art of Mado Robin, minus that lady's thinness of tone at the top, and something of Hilde Gueden's way of managing to suggest that even if the coloratura and *gruppetti* are not always absolutely perfect, that the intention is to please and not stupify!'

## NEXT MONTH APRIL 2017



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Thanks to past pioneers, the countertenor voice is a mainstream part of the modern musical world. We talk to star singer Philippe Jaroussky and his colleagues about the opportunities now open to them

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# Rory Cellan-Jones

The BBC's Technology correspondent on learning the piano, dot-com bubbles and digital revolutions

**I was brought up** by my mum in a one-bedroom flat in Central London with no music whatsoever. But I went to Dulwich College, on a free place, and everybody was in the choir there (I had a terrible voice, but nonetheless was in the choir!). They used to hire the Royal Festival Hall and I remember singing in the Verdi Requiem. I had no real engagement with music, apart from 'That's a nice bit of Mozart'. Mine were very conventional tastes.

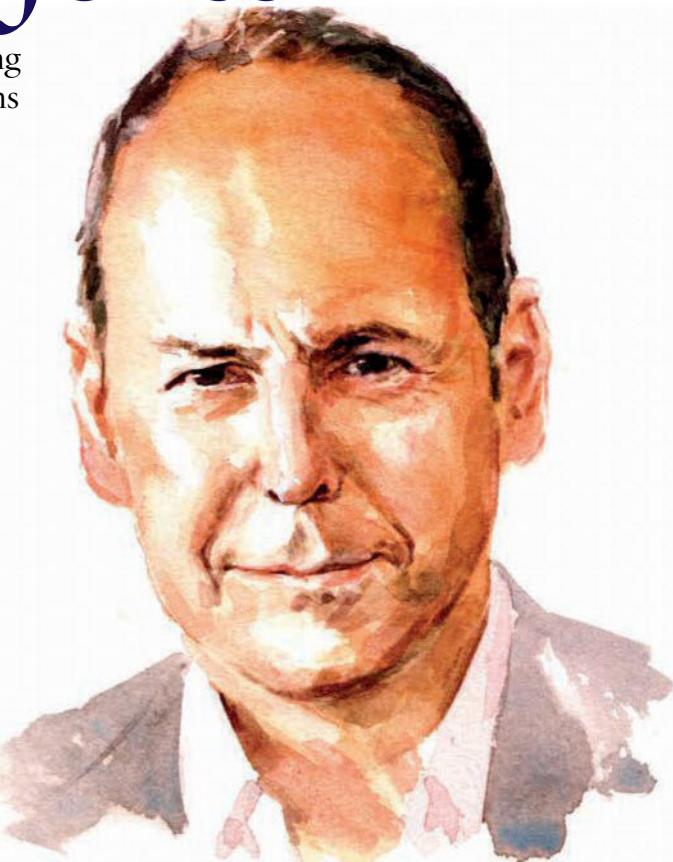
**We decided that our oldest son**, when he was six, should have piano lessons and I, too, thought I'd really love to learn the piano. I was in my mid-thirties and that was 20 years ago. My son gave it up after six months, but I've stuck with it and carried on, and I'm still having a weekly piano lesson. At the moment we're doing a Granados piece and we've done recently a bunch of Satie's *Gnossiennes* and, most enjoyably, Peter Maxwell Davies's *Farewell to Stromness*.

**My second son** also took up the piano and stuck with it for quite a long time, or at least until he went to university. He got to Grade 6; I got to Grade 5 about 10 years ago and it was the most terrifying thing I've ever done. I remember going to my Grade 1 exam and everyone else was wearing ankle socks and they said 'Now Rory!...Oh!', looking up at me. Later, when I got to Grade 5 I scraped through but found it so frightening that I decided enough was enough with the grades. I find the lessons every Saturday morning a wonderful part of my life.

**In the late 1990s**, I was getting bored with business reporting and the most interesting stories were about the rise of Google, and tech activity in this country. I wrote a book about the dot-com bubble and it went far beyond the financial as technology was obviously having a huge impact on the way we lived. I was enthusiastic about the gadgets and what they could do for us and how they'd become integrated into our work. Actually the digital revolution in the music industry became, and has been, a fairly big part of my focus over the years.

**I'm very much a digital consumer.** We got rid of the LPs, and then the CDs and now have a Sonos system, and it's interesting what it does to what you play. We now have Spotify linked to the Sonos. I've also got this new thing, the Amazon Echo, which is voice-controlled and I can say 'Play music by Beethoven' and it will – though admittedly that's rather like shooting into the dark!

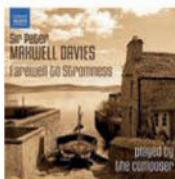
**I think the utopian vision** for having access to so much music is a bit like what's happened to the wider internet. At first it brought us this dream of a perfect democracy where a thousand ideas would flourish and breed debate about the great issues of the day, but now, with the scales fallen from our eyes, what we've got is fake news and trolling, and people living in a filter bubble and retreating into their comfort zone.



## THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Maxwell Davies** *Farewell to Stromness*

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies *p/f* Naxos



I recently learnt this piece and I'm always taken by how powerful it is given its simplicity, and also how Celtic it sounds!

**I slightly wonder** whether the same thing happens with music. When you first get Spotify, you think 'I'll look at this or look at that', but you end up listening to things you already know. Of course that may be an age thing – when you're in your fifties you're not as open to new experiences as when you were in your twenties. Then you were eager to be the person who finds the new band or the new recording. I wonder if that's still true of people in their twenties...

**When it comes to 'free'**, there are interesting parallels between the music and newspaper worlds – I always think of *Private Eye* as a perfect example of an organisation which resolutely refuses to give away its content and it's worked. People still pay £1.80 for a piece of paper.

**The other interesting thing** is how smug journalists were about the crisis in the music industry. People were saying 'You should have seen it coming, you big old music labels, and now you're toast.' Actually the music industry's sort of come through the other side and now it's journalism that's deep in the mire, and nobody has a sure-fire answer. More and more it reinforces the value of the BBC and the public service model. ⑥

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